

WRITING

EMILY DICKINSON'S MASTER HOURS

in TIME

MARTA WERNER

Writing in Time

Dear Master

I am all
but growing more
that you are all.
make my stronger hand
work long ever to all
you. I thought perhaps
you were in Heaven,
and when you spoke
again, it seemed
quite sweet and
wonderful, and surprised
me so. I wish that
you were well.
I remain yours all

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AMHERST COLLEGE PRESS

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The manuscripts of the core documents represented in this edition are part of the Emily Dickinson Collection housed in the Amherst College Library. I am ever grateful to Mike Kelly, Head of the Archives & Special Collections, for giving me unstinted access to these materials. Tim Pinault, Digitization Coordinator for Amherst College, created new images of the core documents for this edition that enable readers to see them in luminous detail. Archivist Margaret Dakin, whose knowledge of the Emily Dickinson Collection is wide and deep, supported my research in countless ways. Leslie A. Morris, Gore Vidal Curator of Modern Books and Manuscripts at the Houghton Library,

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Finally, without my beloved partner, the Petrarch scholar H. Wayne Storey, this edition would not exist. He accompanied me at every stage—*at every hour*—of the research and writing of this work. I have lost count of the number of times he read and commented on the pages that follow. He is my unnamed collaborator. He made me a philologist at last. I dedicate this edition to him.

Archives & Scholarly Editions

- A** Amherst College Archives & Special Collections. The manuscripts of the five principal works included here are housed in the Amherst College Library, Archives & Special Collections. They were catalogued by Jay Leyda in the 1950s and assigned the numbers A 825–A 829. Although these numbers have no relation to any ordering system used by Dickinson, they do identify specific manuscripts and the singular versions of the texts carried by them. Given the emphasis in this edition on the relationship between message and medium, I have elected to use these numbers as opposed to first lines when referring to a particular text on a particular document. References to line numbers within a text are to physical rather than metrical lines.
- H** Houghton Library, Harvard University. In addition to the five documents at the core of this edition, the original manuscripts of a number of “Master” poems bound into fascicles are housed at the Houghton Library, Harvard University.

Commonly Referenced Editions of the “Master” Documents and Related Writings

- MLT 1894 Mabel Loomis Todd, ed. *Letters of Emily Dickinson*. 2 vols. Boston: Roberts Brothers, 1894. [References are to page numbers.]
- MLT 1931 Mabel Loomis Todd, ed. *Letters of Emily Dickinson*. New York: Harper & Brothers, 1931. [References are to page numbers.]
- MLT 1945 Mabel Loomis Todd and Millicent Todd Bingham, eds. *Bolts of Melody: New Poems of Emily Dickinson*. New York: Harper & Brothers, 1945. [References are to page numbers.]
- MTB 1955 Millicent Todd Bingham, ed. *Emily Dickinson’s Home: Letters of Edward Dickinson and His Family*. New York: Harper & Brothers 1955. [References are to page numbers.]
- THJ 1955 Thomas H. Johnson, ed. *The Poems of Emily Dickinson*. 3 vols. Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1955. [References are to poem number (J).]
- THJ 1958 Thomas H. Johnson, ed., with Theodora Ward. *The Letters of Emily Dickinson*. 3 vols. Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1958. [References are to letter number (L).]
- YH 1960 Jay Leyda. *The Years and Hours of Emily Dickinson*. 2 vols. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1960. [References are to volume and page number.]
- RWF 1986 R. W. Franklin, ed. *The Master Letters*. Amherst, MA: Amherst College Press, 1986. [References are to page number.]
- RWF 1998 R. W. Franklin, ed. *The Poems of Emily Dickinson: Variorum Edition*. 3 vols. Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1998. [References are to poem number (Fr) and version (A, B, C, etc.).]
- OMC 1998 Ellen Louise Hart and Martha Nell Smith, eds. *Open Me Carefully: Emily Dickinson’s Intimate Letters to Susan Huntington Dickinson*. Ashfield, MA: Paris Press, 1998. [References are to page number.]
- CM 2016 Cristanne Miller, ed. *Emily Dickinson’s Poems: As She Preserved Them*. Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2016. [References are to page number.]

Prologue

To the Reader

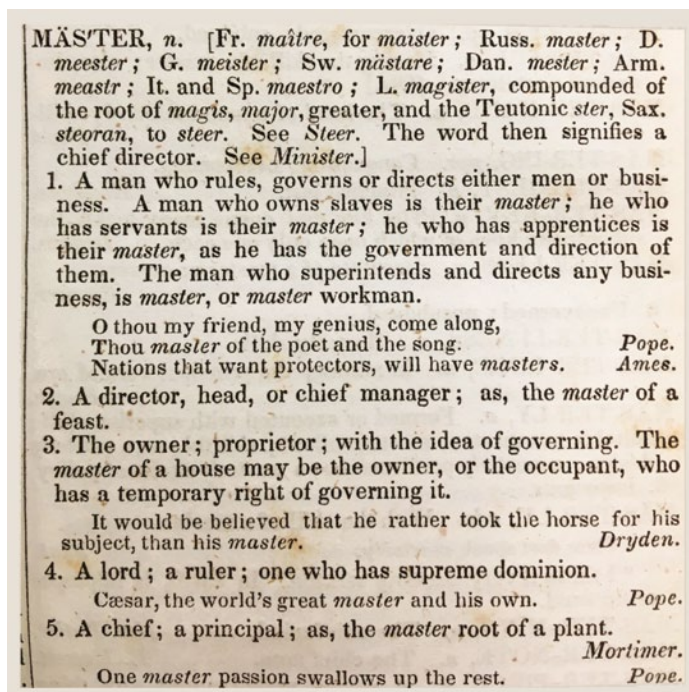


Fig. 1. *Master* defined in Noah Webster's *American Dictionary of the English Language*, 1844

For more than half a century, the story of Emily Dickinson's "Master" documents has been the story of three letters to an unknown individual. In the first scholarly edition to present the texts to twentieth-century readers (1958), Thomas H. Johnson could not positively identify the addressee but conjectured that he was the Reverend Charles Wadsworth. Some twenty-eight years later, the editor of the second scholarly edition, Ralph W. Franklin, eschewed such conjecture regarding the precise identity of the addressee but reasserted the documents' identity as correspondence and evidence of "a long relationship, geographically apart."¹ Both editions present the documents as stray, even random survivors from a much larger body of letters now likely lost forever. But perhaps even more significantly, both editions see gaps in the textual record as reason to close off further inquiry, leaving the documents in the mystery of their seeming unconnectedness.

What if, instead of imagining the "Master" documents as part of the drift of what has been lost, we seek to restore them in relation to what remains?

Writing in Time: Emily Dickinson's Master Hours tells the story of the documents themselves and of a set of related documents as well as the history of their strictly documentary character and transmission. Although three of the documents were cast by Dickinson tendentially in the form of letters, reading them as purely epistolary creates many unnecessary problems and distractions. Interesting new questions arise when we begin to study the materials at their primal documentary level. Are they letters in the usual sense? What emotional and intellectual crises do they involve and what

¹ See Thomas H. Johnson's *The Letters of Emily Dickinson*, 3 vols. (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1958), and R. W. Franklin's *The Master Letters of Emily Dickinson* (Amherst, MA: Amherst College Press, 1986). For Johnson's election of Wadsworth as the likely addressee of these documents, see his headnote to the letters 1858 to 1861. Franklin's claim about the documents' identity as correspondence appears in the introduction to his edition (p. 5).

textual itineraries may be tracked through them? Indeed, how many “Master” documents exist? In what ways do they touch other works around them in time and space? What poems arise, what correspondences begin or end alongside them, and what works emerge in the lacunae that separate them? Did they continue to exert a hidden but powerful influence, inflecting even Dickinson’s late works? What do they have to say to us—in our time?

My inquiry is not a quest to discover the identity of a “Master”. Interesting as that question is and has long been, I want to shift the focus elsewhere. The material documents themselves and their transmission and critical history are highly provocative and suggestive as such. To study both closely is to discover the traces of entangled narratives that are at least as rich and strange as the biographical conjectures we have inherited from a difficult editorial and critical past. Created in a brief but significant moment of time, ca. 1858 to ca. 1861, they throw significant new light on how Dickinson was trying to imagine the course and shape of her poetic life.

At the heart of *Writing in Time* is a new facsimile edition of five “Master” documents, the three more epistolary works traditionally associated with the grouping and two poems recoverable under the “Master” rubric. The edition’s form is material and philological: it does not proceed against the grain of previous speculation but against speculation itself and the over-determination of the documents’ critical history and interpretation. Rather than forging explications in favor of one or another interpretation, the edition’s aim is to establish as rigorously as possible the texts carried by the documents and their manifold and even contradictory complexities. In the textual apparatus preceding the facsimile edition, I seek to track and explore the evolution of the documents’ material, ramifying characteristics and connections as they follow no single trajectory and run towards no certain end. In the pages following the edition, I close with a series of commentaries that, although still attentive to the edition’s philological and material emphasis, enact my own metamorphosis from editor to executant. Inevitably, editing these documents entailed learning them by heart and so affording them what George Steiner has called “an indwelling

clarity” and agency within my own consciousness.² These “Reading Hours” reflect my investment in a process of interpretation that involves an answerability to documents that now seem to me like “gifts bearing destinies”.³

Ultimately, *Writing in Time* comprises an experiment in what I would call—looking back at an intense process of bibliographical analysis of a few documents Dickinson kept close in her care and custody like a poetic mooring until the end of her life—intimate editorial investigation. It reconceives the editorial enterprise as a critical meditation and devotional exercise. Here each sphere of inquiry—historical, textual, philological—seeks a maximum act of attention and detailed focus in order to touch upon the mysteries that these radiant documents both make visible and keep hidden.

The debt I owe to the many readers—feminists, poets, materialists, and editors—who have intercepted these documents before me is wide and deep.⁴ What follows neither repeats nor forecloses their contributions but offers a new way of approaching these documents whose provocative significance has long been recognized. It is, I hope, a new reading in and for a new hour.

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2 See George Steiner, *Real Presences* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989), p. 9. In the first section of this work, “A Secondary City”, Steiner sets out his imagination of a “politics of the primary” (p. 6) and defines hermeneutics as “the enactment of answerable understanding” (p. 7).

3 This is Paul Celan’s definition of the poem; see his “Letter to Hans Bender” in *Paul Celan: Collected Prose*, trans. Rosmarie Waldrop (New York: Sheep Meadow Press, 1986), p. 26.

4 The wealth of readings of the “Master” documents is hard to overstate. Three lines of descent—embodied respectively by an editor, a poet, and a scholar—are especially important to me. My first debt is to R. W. Franklin, whose editorial work on Dickinson is without peer; a second debt is to Susan Howe, whose scholarship combines in a singular way close material reading with the coordinates of poetry; and my third debt is to Sharon Cameron, whose probing of the structure of identity and its dissolution in Dickinson’s work is central to my thinking about Dickinson’s writings inside and outside the fascicles. The larger sweep of my debts to others can be seen, in part, in the bibliography. Most importantly, I am indebted to Jay Leyda, whose early endeavor to re-imagine Dickinson’s writings in their layered contexts in *The Years and Hours of Emily Dickinson* (2 vols.; New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1960) is recalled, in part, in the title and form of this edition. Leyda’s extensive, often handwritten notes on the Dickinson manuscripts housed at the Amherst College Archives & Special Collections were invaluable guides to the documentary record. It should go without saying that my debt to Thomas H. Johnson, with whom I have so often differed, is also very great. It was Johnson who first cut the editorial path we continue on: while he was the first, I will most certainly not be the last to travel on it and change its course.

Of primary importance, the Master letters nevertheless have had an uncertain history of discovery, publication, dating, and transcription.

R. W. FRANKLIN ⁵

Historical Introduction

The Discovery, Transmission and Printing Histories of the “Master Letters”

Among the mysteries that have grown up around Emily Dickinson—“The Myth” as she is sometimes called—none is more tantalizing than the meaning of the three documents anointed over the years as the “Master Letters”. While scholars, especially Dickinson’s editors, have shaped them into a constellation of conjecturable meanings, they remain deeply strange. So let us begin with what we know. We know that these three texts remained among Dickinson’s papers probably from the late 1850s and early 1860s until her death in 1886 and that they survived both the multiple purges performed presumably by Dickinson herself—as she destroyed drafts of many works after making fair copies—as well as the posthumous destruction of her personal correspondence carried out by her sister, Lavinia, around May 1886.

Beyond these few details, the record becomes somewhat more opaque. The precise location and arrangement of these three documents, especially in relation to the forty fascicles and the hundreds of unbound manuscripts of poems and fragments left among Dickinson’s personal effects at the time of her death, is not precisely known and may never be. In her uncorroborated and conflicting Ur-narratives of discovery, Lavinia first spoke of finding approximately seven hundred of her sister’s poems hidden

away, or only sheltering, in a locked box somewhere in Dickinson’s bedroom.⁶ She later revised this account, claiming that she had recovered all of the writings—more than twice the number originally cited—at one time. The first account, with a sealed box at its center, has the ring of a fable; the second, though seemingly closer to the truth, still tells us nothing about Dickinson’s classification system or if such a system even existed. According to Mabel Loomis Todd, when rumors circulating in the early 1890s seemingly alluded to a missing cache of Dickinson’s “remarkable prose compositions”, Lavinia once again searched “the house from top to bottom” but turned up nothing further—no journal or diary, not a single remnant of additional writing.⁷

Were these three documents, then, found among the groups of writings Lavinia referred to as poems? And if so,

⁵ R. W. Franklin, introduction to *Master Letters*, p. 5.

⁶ In a letter to her friend Mrs. C. S. Mack written on 17 February 1891, Lavinia Dickinson wrote, “I found (the week after her death) a box (locked) containing 7 hundred wonderful poems – carefully copied”; see Thomas H. Johnson, ed., *The Poems of Emily Dickinson*, 3 vols. (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1955), p. xxxix. If the report is accurate, the poems Lavinia discovered were almost certainly those in the fascicles, but where were the others?

⁷ Mabel Loomis Todd, ed., *Letters of Emily Dickinson* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1931), p. xvi. Todd believed that Lavinia had found several groups of writings at slightly different times.

is their site of discovery, among Dickinson's verses, a clue as to how Dickinson regarded them as well as the other fragmentary writings, many from the later years, that may also have lain with them and that, to some ears, sound along different points on the continuum from prose to verse? Does this potential proximity among her poetic works suggest even their influence? In the end, these questions cannot be answered definitively, and we must be satisfied with knowing only what documents Dickinson (or, rather, history) saved and not where or why these were saved while others were discarded.

The transmission history of the three drafts is also a matter of some conjecture. Franklin notes that Mabel Loomis Todd was aware of the existence of the documents by the early 1890s.⁸ Jay Leyda, who dealt extensively with Todd's daughter, Millicent Todd Bingham, during the long journey of these manuscripts from Bingham's private collection first to the Folger Library and then to the Amherst College Archives, believed the documents had passed from Lavinia Dickinson, who inherited all of Dickinson's personal possessions, to Todd around 1891.⁹ Still, a great many documents, not just these three, were handed over at the same time, and thus the transmission history of the three documents, even if it is correct, does not offer conclusive evidence of their identity as a distinct constellation. In *Emily Dickinson's Home* (1955), where Bingham prints the documents in full for the first time and has an opportunity to clarify this history, she does so only partially. Bingham notes that unlike the other family papers printed in *Home*, the documents printed in Part V, which

include these three manuscripts, were turned over to her mother not in the early to mid-1890s by Austin Dickinson but at a different time and, she implies, by a different source.¹⁰

Given that Lavinia seems to have controlled those Dickinson manuscripts stored within the family home, the Homestead, did she alone know of the existence of these drafts before giving them to Todd, and, if so, what did she know and when? Had she read these works that still startle us in their strangeness, or did the mounting internal pressure she felt to bring all her sister wrote into the light lead her to let go of them precipitately, without first examining them? According to Leyda, Lavinia often marked manuscripts with a cross or x, yet there are no marks by a hand other than Dickinson's on these three documents, no sign of another's close perusal, with the exception of two tiny notes clarifying two words in A 829 that were almost certainly made by Bingham when she prepared transcriptions for *Home*. But whether Lavinia read them or not, she seems to have yielded them to Todd without any special instructions and without contextualizing or differentiating them from the hundreds of other manuscripts she also put in Todd's care ca. 1891.¹¹

For all of the uncertainties attending their discovery and transmission, in 1891, the construction of them as the "Master Letters"—that is, as three "letters" to a man identified as "Master"—was at this moment yet to come. It is not too much to say that print determined their classification as letters and, more importantly, as correspondence and that print also ultimately defined the "Master" documents as an inviolate trinity.

8 Todd's inclusion of six sentences from A 828 in *Letters of Emily Dickinson*, 2 vols. (Boston: Roberts Brothers, 1894), confirms her early knowledge of these works. Martha Nell Smith believes the "Master" documents first passed from Austin Dickinson's hands to Todd's, but I have not found evidence to confirm this; see Martha Nell Smith's *Rowing in Eden: Rereading Emily Dickinson* (Austin: Texas University Press, 1992), p. 109.

9 Leyda's cataloguing records for the "Master" documents in the Amherst College Archives & Special Collections include the note *LND to MLT, 1891?* His understanding of the transmission history probably derived from Millicent Todd Bingham's family narrative. Leyda is a crucial figure for our understanding of Dickinson's writings, and all readers are indebted to his work, part biography, part compendium, *The Years and Hours of Emily Dickinson*, 2 vols. (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1960). Among the many works included in *Years and Hours* are the three epistolary "Master" texts. Here, though, Leyda's aims are more biographical than textual, and his transcriptions of the "Master" documents offer only redacted versions of each one. My references to Leyda are generally to his more textually oriented cataloguing notes on the "Master" documents rather than to this published work. In my notes on the history of the dating of these documents, however, I include both the dates on Leyda's cataloguing notes and the dates he proposed in *Years and Hours*.

10 In the chapter of *Emily Dickinson's Home: Letters of Edward Dickinson and His Family* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1955; hereafter cited as *Home*) devoted to the manuscripts, Bingham writes simply, "It was while the 1894 volumes were in preparation that the letters in this book (except the Sweetser collection and those in Part Five) were given to my mother by Emily's brother, William Austin Dickinson. They were all the family letters he had left, or all he could find, after fire destroyed his office and most of his historical records during the blizzard of March 11–14, 1888" (p. 48). Of the transmission history of the "Master Letters", printed in Part V of *Home*, Bingham writes only, "Among Emily Dickinson's fragmentary manuscripts were found drafts of three letters in writing of this period" (p. 420). Did the fragmentary manuscripts constitute a discrete group?

11 If Leyda's records are correct, Lavinia Dickinson gave more than three hundred manuscripts carrying poems, letters, and fragments to Mabel Loomis Todd ca. 1891. For a complete inventory of these materials, see Leyda, Box 32, Amherst College Archives & Special Collections. Lavinia also seems to have passed manuscripts on to Todd in 1888, 1889, and 1892. It is possible that further study of the transmission histories of these documents may yield information about Dickinson's original groupings of materials.

Early Printings

By tracing the itinerary of the documents through the press, it is possible to detect quite precisely the early moment of their clothing-cloaking in a specific genre as well as the subsequent moment(s) of their coalescence as a constellation. As Franklin explains in his summary of the publication of these three documents, the texts were not published together and in full until 1955, when Millicent Todd Bingham printed them in *Home*. Before this, as he observes, no biographical or critical studies were informed by an awareness of their existence.¹² It is equally true to say that after 1955, no study could have avoided a knowledge of them. The first printed trace of their existence, however, came in 1894, when Mabel Todd printed a few scattered lines from two leaves of one document—A 828—in her edition of *Letters*, largely stripping them of their punctuation and capitalization, then apparently deliberately misdating the lines as from ca. 1885:

. . . *If you saw a bullet hit a bird, and he told you he wasn't shot, you might weep at his courtesy, but you would certainly doubt his word. Thomas's faith in anatomy was stronger than his faith in faith. . . . Vesuvius don't talk — Ætna don't. One of them said a syllable, a thousand years ago, and Pompeii heard it and hid forever. She couldn't look the world in the face afterward, I suppose. Bashful Pompeii! . . .*¹³

In 1931, Todd reprinted the identical lines in her expanded edition of *Letters*, retaining the same misleading date in the headnote. In this edition, however, edited jointly with Millicent Todd Bingham, one of them has added the following opaque footnote: “This letter seems to be out of place. The original draft is in the handwriting of the early 60’s.”¹⁴ In *Home*, Bingham held that Todd failed

12 See Franklin, introduction to *Master Letters*, pp. 5–7.

13 See Todd, *Letters* (1894), pp. 422–23; Todd includes this passage in section IX of volume 2, a section containing letters “To Mr and Mrs Jenkins, Mrs Read, Mrs W. A. Stearns, Mrs Edward Tuckerman, Mrs Cooper, Mrs Davis, Mrs Hills, Mrs Jameson, Mr Emerson, Maggie Maher, Mr and Mrs Montague, Miss W. F. Stearns, Mr J. K. Chickering, Mrs Sweetser, Mr Niles, Miss Carmichael, Dr and Mrs Field, Mr Holland, ‘H. H.’, Miss Hall, Mrs Crowell, and Mrs J. C. Greenough”. Why she chooses to include the lines in this grouping of letters is unclear. The same arrangement is repeated in Todd’s *Letters* (1931).

14 See Todd, *Letters* (1931), p. 411n10. Although there is no way of knowing, it seems likely that Bingham either added this note herself or that Todd added it when she or Bingham noticed the discrepancy in the handwriting.

to wholly correct the record or print additional passages in deference to Austin and Lavinia’s wishes.¹⁵ While this may have been the case in 1894, by 1931 both Lavinia and Austin had been dead for over thirty years, and it is difficult to imagine that the same need to comply with family wishes still guided Todd’s editorial decisions. Indeed, the paratexts to Todd’s 1931 *Letters* hint at a different, more complex story about both Todd’s proprietary relationship with Dickinson’s textual remains and her anxiety about losing her status as the medium through which Dickinson allegedly spoke to the world.¹⁶

By 1931, biographical accounts of Dickinson were beginning to be widely available, a circumstance that seems to have unsettled Todd. In the preface to her expanded *Letters*, Todd follows a brief review justifying the policies governing her editorial ethos in the 1894 *Letters* with a sharp critique of the life-studies that have arisen between that edition and the present one: “Now, after thirty-seven years, the Emily legend has assumed a shape unrecognizable to one who knew her. Her life is revamped to suit the taste of the times, and Emily herself has all but vanished in the process.”¹⁷ A few pages later, in the introduction to the second edition, she sounds this theme again: “For several years, it seems, a feeling has been growing among students of Emily’s life that something is wrong. Their picture of her in her setting is not altogether true.”¹⁸ To correct this distorted image of Dickinson, Todd first advises a “return to [original] sources” or at least to those sources almost touching the originals: “The careful reader would turn back to *my early volumes* [emphasis added] if he wanted to find the real Emily”. Almost immediately, however, she concedes the unlikelihood of this prospect: “But that is too much to expect.”¹⁹ Temporally estranged from Dickinson and overly keen to trade an understanding of Dickinson’s inner life as it is manifested in her writing for clues regarding her outer existence, Dickinson’s biographers, Todd implies, are necessarily denied the access to the terrain of Dickinson’s spirit that Todd has enjoyed. To the biographers’ tactics, a “conjuring”

15 See Bingham, *Home*, p. 421.

16 For a much more critical interpretation of Todd and Bingham’s construction of the “Master” narrative, see Smith’s *Rowing in Eden*, pp. 97–127.

17 See Todd, *Letters* (1931), p. x.

18 *Ibid.*, pp. xxii–xxiii.

19 *Ibid.*, pp. x, xiii, xiii.

of Dickinson that is quick to mistake the singular in their subject for the pathological, Todd resolutely contrasts those of the textual editor who remains silent in order to let the subject speak for herself: “I have said nothing hitherto”.²⁰

In her preface, Todd seems to suggest that the editorial ethos of her 1931 *Letters* both builds on her 1894 edition and, where necessary, corrects it. In 1894, Todd’s deference to the wishes of the letters’ then living recipients (and at times even to the imagined wishes of the dead) sometimes required the omission of large portions of Dickinson’s letters in Todd’s possession. In the 1931 *Letters*, Todd pledges to redress these omissions, “to supply missing parts”, and to “restore not only entire letters but also passages from others deleted forty years ago”.²¹ By the final lines of the introduction to the second edition, Todd suggests that the process of restitution is complete; she has, even against her better judgment, given up her cache of secrets: “And so I finally assume my share of responsibility in further exposing the depths of Emily’s unfathomable heart [...] [The letters published here] only add to the grandeur of her stature, but even so, her words carry a sting as I write: ‘As there are apartments in our own minds which we never enter without apology, we should respect the seals of others’”.²²

Todd died of a cerebral hemorrhage less than a year after the 1931 publication of *Letters*. Her last edited volume of Dickinson’s writing is structured by a tension between disclosure and concealment that often characterizes publications of private documents, particularly by editors close to the author. Yet in the end, and especially in relation to the three documents gathered here, she withheld far more than she revealed, and no one—that is to say no outsider—could have guessed the extent of what was still missing. In this moment, a moment that will never come again in Dickinson studies, the figures of the archivist and the editor were virtually forged—even driven—together. In the 1890s, Todd had possessed an archive of documents that she alone could open, and she managed that archive with a unique measure of control over what would be known about Dickinson and what

would remain veiled. Even so, this singular concentration of power was under continual threat. For the 1931 *Letters*, she had opened, though we do not know how far, the cache of documents to her daughter. Her private storehouse, moreover, did not hold an infinite number of documents, and each publication depleted it further. Perhaps, in the case of the “Master” documents, Todd failed to print them in full in order to safeguard her status as insider, as the intimate commentator of a once little-known life now increasingly in the searching light of biographers and interpreters of Dickinson’s poetry. The presentation of a brief fragment from a single work maintained the mystique of both the poet and the editor/archivist. At that moment, we do not know that Todd has access to more that she is keeping in reserve.

Perhaps something of that editorial reserve is revealed in a haunting moment towards the end of the introduction to the second edition of *Letters* (1931) when Todd seems to make a concession to the invasive biographers who invent where they cannot find evidence. To those contemporary readers unable to map the terrain of Dickinson’s “spirit” as it is manifested in her manuscript writings, Todd offers a copy of the only known image of Dickinson’s face “taken from life” when she was probably sixteen years old: “Of the topography of her face at all events this untouched photograph of a daguerreotype is a faithful representation”.²³ Yet Todd’s insistence on the “untouched” purity of the image and upon its “faithful representation” ultimately argues the case for a knowledge she did not directly possess: the face in the daguerreotype is one that Todd herself never saw “in life”; her first glimpse of Dickinson’s features coming only at the poet’s funeral.²⁴ Does Todd’s offer of a piece of evidence, at once artifact and facsimile, that she cannot fully possess, except in the most belated and material of senses, signal a discomfortingly incomplete *anagnorisis* about her own distance from Dickinson—and, more to the point, from Dickinson’s most private textual remains? The hiddenness of the “Master” documents, the complex and often inexplicable density of the drafts, must have left her much as they leave us today: desirous of their context and meanings and touchstones

20 Ibid., p. xiii.

21 Ibid., p. x.

22 Ibid., pp. xxiii–xxiv.

23 Ibid., p. xxiii.

24 Biographer Lyndall Gordon (*Lives Like Loaded Guns* [New York: Viking, 2010]) confirms, “Mabel saw Emily Dickinson for the first time in the open coffin at the funeral” (p. 228).

in Dickinson's world and works. Todd's deft—or only unconscious—substitution of the daguerreotype image for the full presentation of the documents in her possession allows her to bypass the more difficult bibliographical truth about her limited knowledge of the “Master” documents she only very partially conveys to Dickinson's readers.

As always, another reading is possible of Todd's motives for withholding what we have come to know, but which she did not name, as the “Master Letters”. In this reading, Todd's decision to print only a few fragmentary lines from a single document itself wrenched out of context reflects her awareness that among Dickinson's textual remains were documents that could not be readily classified but that would, eventually, be reduced by classification. Between 1894 and 1931, it may be that Todd resists a line of descent into the biographical interpretation of Dickinson's works that will later link Dickinson to a “Master” and connect a series of highly disparate drafts to the single genre of “the letter” and a bold experiment in prose and verse to the certainty of a “correspondence” with a human interlocutor.

One reading may not cancel another. Todd's fear of losing her control over Dickinson's textual body and her desire to represent the radical nature of Dickinson's oeuvre may be interlaced strands in her editorial work. However, the evidence supplied only by Todd's partial revelation of one document ensures that in 1931, the “Master” documents had yet to enter literary history. The “Master” narrative cannot be traced to Todd's door.

At Todd's death, her private archive of Dickinson's unpublished manuscripts kept allegedly in a Chinese camphorwood chest, now missing for over fifty years, fell to her daughter, Millicent Todd Bingham.²⁵ In 1932, Bingham, the first woman ever to receive a doctoral degree in geology and geography from Harvard University, was forty-two years old. She had recently held academic appointments

25 In *After Emily: Two Remarkable Women and the Legacy of America's Greatest Poet* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2018), Julie Dobrow traces the history of the camphorwood chest, noting how, at her mother's insistence, Millicent Todd Bingham moved the locked chest around from household to household long before re-opening it and publishing the remainder of its contents. Strangely, the chest seems to have been permanently lost after Bingham's death in 1968. Dobrow's own search for the chest was unsuccessful; see especially chapter 12, “Bringing Lost Poems to Light”, pp. 245–71, and chapter 16, “Unpacking the Camphorwood Chest”, pp. 342–62.

at Columbia University and Sarah Lawrence College lecturing on geography. But her immersion in the patterns of climates, landforms, vegetation, soils, and water had already been interrupted in the late 1920s, when Todd solicited her help in preparing the 1931 *Letters* along with a new edition of Dickinson's poems—the work that would eventually be published in 1945 as *Bolts of Melody*.

With the publication of Bingham's *Home* in 1955, Bingham seems to fulfill Todd's call in 1931 for a “return to sources”—for textual purity. In the same moment, however, Todd's claims for insider knowledge of Dickinson are also concluded: the camphorwood chest has at last been emptied by Bingham.

As the first edition to print largely complete transcripts of the three documents that would soon be known as the “Master Letters”, Bingham's *Home* is in many ways the pivotal publication in the history of these documents. As a comparison of the manuscripts with Bingham's transcriptions shows, her work exhibits a fair degree of textual accuracy, reporting—with a few notable exceptions—the words as Dickinson inscribed them on paper, though very often erring in the representation of Dickinson's variants and overwritten text.²⁶ In response to the challenge of dating the documents and construing their order in relation to one another, Bingham proceeds with caution. Beyond hazarding a date of “about 1861” for one of them, she notes only that Dickinson's handwriting in the remaining two appears to be consistent with that found in documents datable to the early 1860s, a crucial period of emotional turbulence in Dickinson's life, she hypothesizes, but also one “about which very little is known”.²⁷

26 See also Franklin's collation of substantive differences between Dickinson's manuscripts and Todd's, Bingham's, Leyda's, and Johnson's transcriptions in *Master Letters*, pp. 47–48. It is worth noting that Bingham's inclusion of a facsimile of perhaps the most complex (both stylistically and genetically) of these documents—A 828—offers the careful reader the opportunity to compare manuscript and transcript.

27 The document Bingham dates to 1861 is A 828; her dating agrees with Leyda's, Franklin's, and my own; see Bingham, *Home*, p. 417. In her 1949 essay “Emily Dickinson's Handwriting—A Master Key”, Bingham avowed an intimate connection between Dickinson's handwriting and her inner life: “For the changes which with the passing years took place in Emily Dickinson's writing parallel the drama within. [...] In other words, a style of penmanship dates a poem. The poem reflects an inner experience. And so, after a chronological scale has been constructed and tested for accuracy, and the probable time of composition of all available manuscript-poems determined within a year or two, [...] then will a biographer for the first time have firm ground on which to stand” (*The New England Quarterly* 22, no. 2 [June 1949]: 229–34).

To offset to some degree the apparent absence of recoverable context for these exceptional drafts, Bingham draws on her instincts and formal training as a geographer to think contextually. Like the 1856 topographical map of Hampshire County included in *Home* to provide the reader with a sense of the coordinates of Dickinson's world, here Bingham presents a catalogue of recorded events both personal (marriages and deaths) and political (the Civil War) between 1861 and 1862. She believes that out of these events the drafts may have arisen, concluding, "The effect of shock after shock throughout many months, against the background of fratricidal strife, is enough to explain her distress."²⁸ Yet at the close of her introduction to these documents, Bingham steps back even from this conclusion, casting doubt on the three works as an identifiably distinct constellation, on their address to a single identifiable interlocutor, and on Dickinson's intentions regarding them: "But whoever the man, or men – for all three letters may not be addressed to the same person – here is further evidence that for Emily Dickinson her own heart was her most insistent and baffling contentent [. . .]. Here then are the letters which pose more questions than they answer."²⁹

Bingham's representation of these documents differs in important ways from their appearance in later editions by Johnson and Franklin. Most importantly, her grouping of the documents reflects a marked circumspection about their origins and relationships to one another. Although Bingham does wonder, "Who could have inspired such letters as these?" it is not the documents' attachment to a specific "Master" figure but rather the site of their location among Dickinson's surviving papers, specifically "among

Dickinson's fragmentary manuscripts", and their link to the early 1860s—a period otherwise largely devoid of drafts—that associate them with one another. Moreover, though Bingham printed them together for the first time in *Home*, the three documents were not yet set apart as a distinct constellation but still imagined as part of the larger drift of bibliographical outliers in Dickinson's archive.³⁰

Bingham's *Home* was ready for publication by 1950. Had the three drafts entered literary history at that moment, the course of their reception and interpretation might have been quite different. *Home* is in fact a site of multiple losses, not only private losses but excruciatingly public ones as well. During the early 1950s, Bingham's literary rights to publish the materials contained in *Home* were challenged, and the presses stopped. In an uncanny repetition of editorial history, just as Todd's work on Dickinson's writings had been halted for more than thirty years by a lawsuit filed in 1898 by Lavinia Dickinson against Todd contesting her right to a tiny piece of land deeded to her by Austin Dickinson as partial payment for her editorial labor on Dickinson's poems, so Bingham's publication of *Home* was delayed for almost five years by legal troubles with Harvard University, which ultimately claimed ownership of all of Dickinson's writings.

The resolution of Harvard's legal challenges and the publication of Bingham's *Home* had a complex genesis. While Todd's death in 1932 may have perhaps put in motion the history that follows, the death in 1943 of

28 See Bingham, *Home*, p. 420. Among the specific events Bingham alludes to here are the marriage of John Dudley, thought by some to have been dear to Dickinson, and Eliza Coleman in June 1861; the birth of Dickinson's nephew Ned in June 1861; the death of Elizabeth Barrett Browning in June 1861; the serious illness of Samuel Bowles in October 1861; the death of Frazer Stearns in the battle of New Bern in March 1862; the Bowleses' departure for Europe in April of 1862; Dickinson's first contact with Thomas Wentworth Higginson in April 1862; and the Rev. Wadsworth's departure for California in June 1862.

29 Bingham, *Home*, pp. 421–22. Although Bingham is in the most direct line of descent—she inherits the documents from Todd, who likely received them from Lavinia Dickinson—her knowledge about them is limited. She did not know—as we still do not know—the history of the documents' composition, their exact place within Dickinson's private archive, the circumstances of their discovery among her papers after her death, or even how and when they passed into Todd's hands. She did believe that the documents were not given to her mother by Austin Dickinson, however, and thus Lavinia is probably the unnamed source referred to in *Home*.

30 Although it is impossible to reconstruct Dickinson's original archival arrangement of her writings, we can say with certainty that the three "Master" drafts were not handled by Dickinson in the way that the much later drafts and fragments associated with Judge Otis Lord, a family friend with whom Dickinson was in love in the final decade of her life, seem to have been. Like the "Master" documents, these drafts were never discarded, nor were fair copies of them ever recovered. Yet unlike the "Master" documents, the identity of the addressee is known to us and the transmission history of the documents is at least partly traceable. According to Bingham, Todd received the Lord fragments in the 1890s from Austin Dickinson, to whom Dickinson herself may have entrusted them; they were, moreover, grouped together in "a used brown envelope, addressed in an unknown hand to 'Miss E. C. Dickinson, Amherst, Mass.'" and bearing "canceled stamps an issue of the 1880s"; see Bingham's *Emily Dickinson: A Revelation* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1954), p. 1. Todd seems to have treated the contents of the envelope as a sacred trust, and in passing them on to Bingham, who ultimately published them in *A Revelation*, she conveyed their transmission history. Had Todd known anything about the relations between the three "Master" drafts, or had the documents been physically associated with one another when they came into her possession, or had they been conveyed to her by Austin Dickinson, she almost certainly would have communicated these details to Bingham.

Martha Dickinson Bianchi, heir to Susan Dickinson's share of Dickinson's manuscripts, was the most immediate catalyst, prompting new questions about the value of finding a permanent home for all of Dickinson's papers. In this moment many players suddenly appeared to claim a stake in the proceedings. Among the institutions interested in acquiring the hitherto private archives of Martha Dickinson Bianchi and Millicent Todd Bingham were the Library of Congress, the Houghton Library, and the Amherst College Library; among the individuals with equally formidable investments in Dickinson's manuscripts were William McCarthy, Gilbert Montague, and William Jackson, all associated with Harvard, as well as Charles Cole, then president of Amherst College.

In retrospect, it is clear that by the 1950s, the end of the privately owned archive was already at hand. What is less obvious but especially significant for the editorial fortunes of the "Master" documents is that the systematic, institutional effort to control Dickinson's textual remains at that moment was linked to the advent of the New Bibliography with its commitment to a more objective methodology founded on less reductive transcriptions of originals and W. W. Greg's notions of copy-text. In the five years that *Home* languished unprinted at Harper & Brothers, Harvard readied one of its own to assume the mantle of editorship of all Dickinson's writings. Thomas H. Johnson's star was rising. In many ways, literary history was as much an agent in his rise as Harvard. Johnson, a Harvard-prepared scholar of American literature who had worked with Perry Miller on the American seventeenth century, was an embodiment of the new form of editor imagined by the New Bibliography—an academically based textual scholar associated with a library, a university, or a university press. The insider status of intimate commentator in the world of Dickinson that Bingham had enjoyed was now being deeply challenged by this new, seemingly more objective and methodologically consistent specialist. For his part, Johnson began his tenure as Harvard-appointed editor by casting doubt on the work of all of Dickinson's earlier editors: "We have no assurance that any of Emily Dickinson's works now in print is an accurate transcription of her original writing."³¹

³¹ Quoted in Dobrow, *After Emily*, p. 303. Dobrow's account of this history in *After Emily* is definitive; see especially, chapter 14, "Battling over Emily's Papers (1946–1959)", pp. 295–324.

Harvard's tactic worked. When *Home* was finally issued in the early spring of 1955, it was virtually eclipsed by the nearly simultaneous publication of Johnson's *Emily Dickinson: An Interpretive Biography* and his *The Poems of Emily Dickinson, including variant readings critically compared with all known manuscripts*. Johnson's promise of a scholarly edition of Dickinson's letters soon to follow rendered Bingham's publication of selected letters almost irrelevant. Moreover, while Johnson's professional acknowledgment to Bingham in his variorum—"I acknowledge the courtesy of Mrs. Millicent Todd Bingham in making available for study and photostating all of the large number of manuscripts of Dickinson poetry in her possession"³²—positioned her as a custodian rather than an editor of the work, Thomas J. Wilson's note in the "Publisher's Preface" to the same volume canceled Bingham's stakes in Dickinson's manuscripts entirely: "It must be stated here that The President and Fellows of Harvard College claim the sole ownership and sole right of possession in all the Emily Dickinson manuscripts now in possession of Mrs. Millicent Todd Bingham, and all the literary rights and copyrights therein."³³ Bingham's work was essentially over. In the final dark turn in her personal relationship to Dickinson's papers, the documents Bingham last relinquishes to the Amherst College Library, including the three "Master" drafts, confirm her—and Todd's—status as outsiders. The documents do not belong to her any more than to the host of unknown, unprivileged readers who follow in her wake, turning their leaves without ever quite touching them, reading what traces they can.

In 1960, referring to her years of work on Dickinson's papers, Bingham wrote, "I have been trying to think what has motivated me all along. I have thought it was loyalty to my mother's wishes, whether or not I agreed with her objectives. But I think it is rather the wish to rectify an injustice. It may be that I cannot change this drive until I am destroyed by it."³⁴ In the wake of the publication of *Home*, when the connection to Dickinson had at last been

³² Johnson, acknowledgments to *Poems* (1955), p. xiii.

³³ Wilson was the director of the Harvard University Press during this time; see his "Publisher's Preface" in *Poems* (1955), p. xii.

³⁴ Quoted in Dobrow, *After Emily*, p. 323. The passage is from Millicent Todd Bingham's "Journal", 13 November 1960, Millicent Todd Bingham Papers (hereafter cited as MTBP), VII. 130–37, Sterling Library, Yale University.

broken, Bingham dedicated herself to protecting the “forest-covered island” that had been her mother’s sanctuary and to amassing, ordering, and preserving the more than seven hundred boxes of her own family’s papers that currently lie in the archives of the Yale University Library.³⁵ Neither project, however, seems to have brought her the sense of resolution she was seeking. In the end, the geographer-turned-editor and, ultimately, archivist seemed to harbor an ever-present sense of disaster. And when, a few years before her own death in 1968, Bingham made the following observation, it seems possible that she was imagining not only the future fate of her mother’s green island but also the unlikelihood that any human artifact—any piece of paper carrying a message—was anything other than ephemeral: “Man can now be ranked with earthquakes and tidal waves as a geological agent of destruction, one potentially even more powerful now that the atom is at his disposal. The people in the country must realize what is happening, for the hour is late.”³⁶

In the Hour of the New Bibliography

The next time the “Master” documents see the light of print is in Thomas H. Johnson’s magisterial three-volume *Letters of Emily Dickinson*, published by the Belknap Press of Harvard University Press in 1958, the promised companion to his 1955 three-volume edition of the poems. Although many of Dickinson’s earlier editors had by default used her manuscripts as base texts, Johnson’s training as a textual editor in the tradition of W. W. Greg—Greg’s “The Rationale of Copy-Text” was first published in *Studies in Bibliography* in 1950–1951³⁷—would have led him to grant paramount authority to Dickinson’s manuscripts, using them as copy-texts whenever possible in his editions. Greg’s work would also have prepared him to approach the manuscripts with a fine eye for both

Dickinson’s “substantives”—those readings “that affect the author’s meaning or the essence of his expression”—and, especially, her “accidentals”—that is, “spelling, punctuation, word-division, and the like, affecting mainly [the text’s] formal presentation.”³⁸

In the main, the lineaments of Johnson’s *Letters* (1958) reflect the principles of the New Bibliography rigorously and thoughtfully applied. No earlier edition of Dickinson’s letters is guided by such high aims—“All autograph letters are presented in their verbatim form”³⁹—and no earlier edition exhibits so wide or deep an understanding of the textual condition and cruxes inherent in Dickinson’s manuscripts. It is puzzling, then, to find a marked discrepancy between theory and practice in Johnson’s representation of the “Master” documents. His transcriptions offer only a somewhat more accurate rendering of the texts than those prepared by Bingham, and, like Bingham, Johnson fails to distinguish clearly between variant and canceled readings and obscures individual and distinct moments in Dickinson’s compositional process.⁴⁰ Of course, the representation in print of Dickinson’s handwritten productions was, and still remains, challenging. In addition to the limits of what typographical characters in a given type font can convey of Dickinson’s often idiosyncratic but meaningful letterforms and punctuation, editors from Todd to Johnson were beholden to print standards and conventions that ultimately reduce the range of Dickinson’s handwritten markings, and poetic expression, to a common set of diacritics and indicators. And though Johnson seemed methodologically bound to represent Dickinson’s punctuation more faithfully, he would still have been limited by the print technology and graphological conventions of the

38 Ibid., p. 21.

39 Thomas H. Johnson, “Notes on the Present Text,” in *Letters* (1958), p. xxv. In *Emily Dickinson’s Open Folios: Scenes of Reading, Surfaces of Writing* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1995), my first foray into the world of scholarly editing, I put the case against Johnson’s *Letters* (1958) bluntly: “Driven on by the desire to establish a definitive, or ‘fixed,’ text [...] a scholar-editor ends up domesticating a poet [...]. The gold imprimatur — emblem or face of Harvard’s authority stamped across the blue binding of Johnson’s *Letters* (1958) — is a false witness” (5). Now chastened by a quarter century of thinking about how to edit Dickinson’s writings, I feel called to return to the scene of Johnson’s editorial project to offer a more nuanced account of the challenges he faced in carrying out his work.

40 For instance, while Bingham’s transcription of A 827, the most straightforward of the three “Master” documents, exhibits three substantive departures from the text of Dickinson’s manuscript, Johnson’s transcription of the same document exhibits four substantive departures from the text. For an overview of these differences, see Franklin’s appendix to *Master Letters*, pp. 47–48.

35 The island referred to here is Hog Island, off the coast of Maine, where Todd died. Between 1908 and her death in 1932, she spearheaded efforts to preserve Hog Island from a series of environmental threats, including clear-cutting. Millicent Todd Bingham later donated the land to the Audubon Society.

36 See “Bingham, Millicent Todd (1880–1968),” in *Women in World History: A Biographical Encyclopedia*, accessed 10 June 2018, <https://www.encyclopedia.com/women/encyclopedias-almanacs-transcripts-and-maps/bingham-millicent-todd-1880-1968>. See also Millicent Todd Bingham, “Toward Conservation: An Island Leads the Way,” 1937, MTBP, VI. 118–75.

37 W. W. Greg, “The Rationale of Copy-Text,” *Studies in Bibliography* 3 (1950–1951): 19–36.

genre imposed by presses in the 1950s.

The role of such forces in shaping Johnson's *Letters* (1958) is significant. In this case, however, there is another more immediate explanation for the unusually high rate of error in Johnson's transcriptions of the "Master" documents. By the time Johnson's edition of *Letters* (1958) was published, the vast majority of Dickinson's manuscripts had found permanent homes at either Harvard's Houghton Library or the Amherst College Library, the two institutions that today remain, along with the Boston Public Library, the major repositories of her manuscripts. In 1950, however, at the onset of Johnson's editorial project, many manuscripts were still in private hands. While the sale of Martha Dickinson Bianchi's share of the manuscripts, including approximately 1,000 of Dickinson's poem manuscripts as well as some 300 autograph letters, to Harvard was well underway, the approximately 850 poem manuscripts as well as numerous fragments and 350 autograph letters remained under Millicent Todd Bingham's control until 1956 when she gifted them to Amherst College.⁴¹

As noted earlier, the passage of Dickinson's manuscripts from private hands into institutional repositories was marked by conflict and delay, factors that may well have affected Johnson's work. To fulfill the promise of a scholarly edition of the letters, Johnson needed unimpeded access to all of Dickinson's manuscripts, and such access was not possible. Never once during the preparation of his edition of Dickinson's *Letters* was Johnson able to view all of Dickinson's autograph letters and drafts together or to engage in the intensely comparative work that liberal access would have allowed. Instead, Johnson was often limited to examining small batches of photostatic copies of the manuscripts. Moreover, while we know that Bingham allowed Johnson direct access to many of the Dickinson manuscripts still in her control at the time, it is likely, especially given the circumstances, that she also might have withheld access to at least some and that these "some" almost certainly included the three epistolary "Master" drafts. Everything indicates that Johnson's access to these three drafts was belated. The private correspondence between Jay Leyda and Theodora Ward, Johnson's research assistant, confirms this delay, setting the date of

that access to sometime *after* April 1955, when Johnson would have seen them first not in manuscript but in print in Bingham's long-delayed edition, *Home*. Johnson's direct access to the documents themselves would have been even later and thus either very late in the process of preparing his edition or perhaps not even until after it was already in the hands of the printer (1957). Paradoxically, Johnson's less-than-fully accurate transcriptions of the "Master" documents may be read as part of the collateral damage of the Harvard suit and the manuscripts' uneasy transition from private to public space.

Transcriptional errors, though galling to the editors who commit them and disorienting to the readers who parse them, are errors of a second, or lower, order. Once discovered, they can be corrected in a new printing. But Johnson's lack of early access to the three core "Master" documents had still more profound implications for his representation of them and, ultimately, for their place in literary history. Johnson's scholarly aims in *Letters* (1958) were not limited to providing an accurate text. As he writes in the acknowledgments to the 1958 edition, he conceived of the edition as an extension of the "narrative begun in the 1955 edition of the poems, and [...] the interpretive biography issued likewise in 1955". Together these three works were, in Johnson's words, to "set forth the story of Emily Dickinson's life and writing as fully as I know how to tell it".⁴² The mandatory de-coupling of biography and textual scholarship seemingly called for by the New Bibliography (in tandem with the New Criticism) remained unfulfilled. On the contrary, in Johnson's presentation of the "Master" documents, the biographical impulse often crossed with, and sometimes overtook, the bibliographical one.

As early as 1954, that is, before having firsthand knowledge of the surviving "Master" documents, Johnson was weaving a narrative regarding a "Master" figure in Dickinson's life. In Johnson's biography, this narrative finds its final form as a story of secret and unrequited love. Taken as fact during Johnson's day and for decades afterwards, the outlines of this story are by now well known. In Johnson's reading, the Reverend Charles Wadsworth, pastor of the Arch Street Presbyterian Church in Philadelphia from 1850 to 1862 and a married

41 At this point, Martha Dickinson Bianchi's share of Dickinson's manuscripts was controlled by Alfred Leete Hampson.

42 Johnson, acknowledgments to *Letters* (1958), p. xi.

man, was the hidden object of Dickinson's love. It was Wadsworth's long delayed departure from the East on 1 May 1862 in response to a call from the congregation of the Calvary Church in San Francisco, a call that had reached him in December 1861, that precipitated, in Johnson's estimation, both Dickinson's "most dangerous emotional crisis" and her most significant poetic breakthrough. "To Emily Dickinson", Johnson conjectured in his interpretive biography, "Wadsworth's departure was heart-rending. The distance was so appallingly vast that his removal [...] seemed to her a living entombment. [...] It was at this time that she began to dress entirely in white, adopting, as she calls it, her 'white election'".⁴³ In Johnson's biographical narrative of Dickinson, this very crisis that supercharged her verse with emotion gave her a deepened sense of purpose: "Wadsworth as muse made her a poet".⁴⁴

Johnson's far-reaching conclusions are surprising given the limits of the textual evidence at his disposal. "The only certain early fact", Johnson writes in chapter IV ("The Poet and the Muse") of his biography of Dickinson, "is that [Charles Wadsworth] called on [Dickinson] in Amherst in 1860" and then again "twenty years later, in the summer of 1880".⁴⁵ Beyond these two documented encounters during their lives, Johnson could add only two pieces of evidence: one brief pastoral letter almost certainly written by Wadsworth—neither dated nor signed, the stationery nonetheless bears the crest "CW"—to Dickinson (misspelled "Dickenson") to convey to her his distress over a message received from Dickinson regarding an unnamed "affliction" and a handful of letters written by Dickinson to close associates of Wadsworth's after his death in 1882.⁴⁶ Of these, the brief but poignant correspondence with Wadsworth's lifelong friend James D. Clark and, in the month before her own death, with Clark's son, Charles H. Clark, are most suggestive of her continued emotional connection to the clergyman.

At this juncture, however, the trail of direct evidence

goes cold, and Johnson's biographical account takes two strange turns. First, he bases his narrative of Dickinson's relationship to Wadsworth on what he presumes is missing—that is, the many (lost) letters at once "emotional [...] in matters touching upon the soul's affections" but also "somewhat disembodied" that Dickinson may have written to Wadsworth and conveyed to him via "covering notes" forwarded by familiar family correspondents.⁴⁷ Second, he uses the very absence of tangible evidence as proof of his claims: "Except to her sister, who never saw Wadsworth, and to Samuel Bowles, whom she seems to have made her confidant, she mentioned Wadsworth to no one. That fact alone establishes the nature of her emotional turmoil. To name Yaweh is to reveal the unmentionable. The curtains of the Ark of the Covenant must remain drawn".⁴⁸ From this point forward, Johnson probes the poems for tangential and circumstantial evidence of the relationship, turning specifically to the poems of "marriage" and renunciation that were written late in 1861 or early 1862" and show "the extent to which her overwrought feelings were poured out".⁴⁹

The seductive beauty of biography, akin perhaps to that of the lyric itself, lies in its ability to give the reader an experience she can enter and feel close to. In many ways, Johnson was a profound reader of Dickinson's writing, and his readerly powers are at their finest in his annotations to the poems introduced in chapter IV of his biography. Beginning with the poems of 1858, where, Johnson writes, "she had begun to let the form of her verse derive from the images and sensations that she wished to realize",⁵⁰ the itinerary he traces shows Dickinson "striking out" from the meters of the hymnodists into more and more ecstatic but only apparently irregular forms until she ultimately arrives in 1862 at a "new order of love poem".⁵¹ Johnson's subtle ear catches the variations in her metrical forms—her combinations of Nines and Sixes, Nines and Fours, Sixes and Fours; her sleight use of vowel rhyme, imperfect rhyme, and suspended rhyme; and the effects of her dashes where periods might have conventionally been

43 Thomas H. Johnson, *Emily Dickinson: An Interpretive Biography* (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1955), p. 81.

44 *Ibid.*, p. 80.

45 *Ibid.*, p. 76.

46 The original manuscript of Charles Wadsworth's letter to Dickinson is in the Emily Dickinson Collection of the Amherst College Library Archives & Special Collections; it is also reprinted in Johnson's *Letters* (1958), L 248a. The most relevant letters to James D. Clark and his son, Charles C. Clark, include the following, all printed in *Letters* (1958): L 766, L 773, L 776, L 788, L 804 (to James D. Clark); L 1039, L 1040 (to Charles H. Clark).

47 Johnson, *An Interpretive Biography*, pp. 80, 77. There is no material evidence of these "cover notes".

48 *Ibid.*, p. 77.

49 *Ibid.*, p. 82.

50 *Ibid.*, p. 84.

51 *Ibid.*, p. 91.

employed—noting “where her intent is realized the attar becomes haunting and unforgettable”.⁵² The exceptional virtuosity of Johnson’s reading carries us forward until we almost collide with his conclusion:

At some period late in 1861, when she came to know of Wadsworth’s impending departure, she was evidently panic-stricken. She had become increasingly skillful and productive. Would she ever in fact be able to write again? [. . .] The effect on Emily Dickinson during the early spring seems to have been quite different from what she expected.⁵³ Her creative abilities, rather than decreasing, enormously multiplied. Yet even as this was happening, she seems to have been deeply apprehensive lest each day’s composition be the last.⁵⁴

Given the intensity of Johnson’s focus on Wadsworth as Dickinson’s “Master” and “muse”, today’s reader of Johnson’s 1955 interpretive biography cannot but be struck by the absence of any reference to the three “Master” documents save in a footnote. In all likelihood, the footnote was added very late in the editorial process and only after Johnson had “discovered” transcriptions of the “Master” documents in Bingham’s *Home* in April 1955.⁵⁵

Johnson’s experience of “discovering” the existence of the three core “Master” documents in a last-minute reading of Bingham’s *Home* and on the verge of his own biography going to press must have been a profoundly ambivalent one. On the one hand, the three epistolary drafts must have seemed like the missing link in his argument, the very textual evidence he had so long been seeking. On the other hand, the nature of the manuscripts, their material condition as unsent and, in two cases, heavily revised drafts found among Dickinson’s own papers, potentially disrupted the narrative in which he was

52 Ibid., p. 93.

53 Note that the spring Johnson refers here to is that of 1862, the time immediately following Wadsworth’s departure, rather than the spring of 1861, when Dickinson probably wrote her final “Master” draft.

54 Johnson, *An Interpretive Biography*, p. 96.

55 The likelihood that the note was a late addition is underscored by the fact that there are only two notes in Johnson’s entire biography, both in chapter 4. The content of the first note suggests that Johnson has only recently seen the printed versions of the “Master” documents in *Home* and that he has not had time to fully integrate them into his argument—and for good reason. The rawness of the “Master” documents conflicts with Johnson’s description of the “disembodied” letters he imagines Dickinson composing to Wadsworth.

already deeply invested. Moreover, Johnson’s ignorance of the documents’ existence and his secondhand access to them first via a rival edition threatened his authority. For a brief moment in 1955, Insider and Outsider—Johnson and Bingham—exchanged places.

Jay Leyda, who worked more directly than Johnson with Bingham, knew of the documents’ existence and, though not at liberty to share them with Johnson, had warned him to postpone publication of his biography.⁵⁶ The following passage in a letter written on 2 April 1955 by Leyda to Johnson’s research associate Theodora Ward just one month before Johnson signed the foreword to his biography corroborates this point and clarifies the timeline:

*After all, Tom [Johnson] has never cared to hold up his schedule for anything, no matter how vital, the coming information promised to be. I begged him to hold off completing the biography until he had seen ED’s *Home* (out by the end of this month, I believe), but his reply [. . .] made it clear that nothing could change his mind about anything.⁵⁷*

Leyda’s letter is a cautionary tale for all scholars—new materials may suddenly knock at one’s door. At the same time, we can only speculate that Leyda’s withholding of his knowledge of the “Master” documents from Johnson, though clearly required by his alliance with Bingham, may have stemmed in part from his concern over how Johnson might (mis)use them to further his argument about Wadsworth’s role in Dickinson’s life. As early as 3 January 1954, Leyda had openly aired his skepticism about Johnson’s conjectures about romantic interests between Wadsworth and Dickinson in a letter to Ward:

Seriously, though, the weakness for me in Tom’s argument (aside from the lean on Whicher, which offends me more than it does you) is that there is not the faintest scrap of evidence to connect Wadsworth with the “volcanic eruption”

56 In 1960, Leyda would publish his own work on Dickinson, *Years and Hours*, in which he includes the three epistolary “Master” documents. Ralph W. Franklin reviews Leyda’s treatment of these documents in his edition of *Master Letters*. Since Leyda’s aims in the *Years and Hours* are more biographical than textual (see note 9), I do not treat this extraordinary resource as a significant edition.

57 This passage is drawn from private correspondence between Jay Leyda and Theodora Ward, 1951–1957, housed at the Houghton Library, Harvard University; see the Theodora Ward Papers, MS Am 2380, Folder 2.

*of 1861–62—no hint that she was yet in correspondence with him—nothing to justify all Tom’s bald naming of Wadsworth as the subject of the poems he thus annotates—not even enough to justify your term of “probable cause.” Possible—at most.*⁵⁸

And in his letter of 2 April 1955, Leyda adds, “Dr. Wadsworth has now died – and this leaves Tom that much more free to pursue C[harles] W[adsworth] as the beau of Emily’s life. For him there would be no question in those Master letters. Everything is grist for the Wadsworth mill.”⁵⁹

The conditions by which one account enters literary history over another that remains undeveloped are almost always clearer in retrospect. The biographical narrative Johnson advances in 1955 regarding Wadsworth’s role in Dickinson’s life and writing may impact his framing, chronology, and perhaps even his classification of the “Master” documents in *Letters* (1958) in important ways. Once Johnson gained access to the “Master” documents—first in their printed forms in Bingham’s *Home* and soon after in their original manuscript form—he might have undertaken a full review of the textual evidence he had amassed to make his claims about Wadsworth as Dickinson’s muse, subjecting both the evidence and his original narrative to new questions. Instead, Johnson read the “Master” documents, with their uncertain history of composition, discovery, transmission and their ambiguous relations to one another, as the apotheosis of that narrative, fitting them into it rather than allowing them to disrupt it in any way.

This is most evident in Johnson’s dating and ordering of the letters. For example, based on Ward’s analysis of Dickinson’s handwriting, Johnson revises Bingham’s dating of the earliest document (A 827) as from the early 1860s to “about 1858” and assigns the plausible date of “about 1861” to the second document (A 828). This re-dating accords with the available textual evidence. However, Johnson’s rationale for the dating of what he takes to be the latest of the three documents, A 829, to “early 1862?” is contrary to the same evidence and riven with contradictions. In the note that follows this text, Johnson first writes that “Accurate dating is impossible” and further that

“The letter may have been written earlier” but then claims that “the characteristics of the handwriting make the present assignment reasonable” (L 248n). Since handwriting is very often the methodological basis for dating Dickinson’s undated manuscripts, why would that same methodological tool fail to attain a reasonably accurate dating for the document now deemed by Johnson as “impossible” to date? What (unidentified) textual markers or external evidence exist to suggest that the document may have been composed at an earlier date? And if this evidence exists, why does Johnson nevertheless settle on the date of early 1862? Here it seems likely that it is not the evidence of handwriting alone but rather the force of Johnson’s biographical narrative that ultimately predetermines the chronological placement of this text. So positioned, moreover, as the final document in the sequence, this radically disjointed, unaddressed, and unsigned draft, composed in a handwriting equally reckless in character, becomes both a privileged witness and a material embodiment of Dickinson’s anguish in the days preceding Wadsworth’s departure from the East.

Johnson the biographer and Johnson the textual scholar appear in conflict again in his decision to place Wadsworth’s one extant message to Dickinson immediately after the text of A 829 in *Letters* (1958). While Johnson confesses to the arbitrary nature of this decision in a note—“The solicitous pastoral letter is placed here because it follows the last of the ‘Master’ letters, and because the present assumption is that ED thought of Wadsworth as ‘Master.’ Actually the letter may have been written at a quite different time” (L 248n)—his positioning of the letter in the body of the edition powerfully suggests that Wadsworth’s message is a response to Dickinson’s disordered and unsent draft.

Johnson’s inability to reconcile fully the roles of editor and biographer plays out in his treatment of the “Master” documents in his 1958 *Letters*. While Johnson seeks to integrate the three documents he became fully aware of only after the publication of his biography, the reader must also negotiate between two registers, the textual and the biographical, resisting the powerful undertow of the latter in order to see the texts as Dickinson left them.

While the personal approaches of editors to the textual and material evidence available to them are rarely reviewed or even acknowledged in the editions they

58 Ibid., Folder 4.

59 Ibid., Folder 2.

construct, these approaches necessarily inform their scholarly methodology and impact in very real ways the conduct of their editions. In this context, both Leyda's private observation and Ward's more generous response seem indicative of the methodological tensions and results inherent in Johnson's narrative in his Dickinson biography. Leyda raises this concern:

*[Johnson] in fact always seems more disturbed than delighted by troublesome new evidence. He loves neat, finished shapes—and I have to suppress my wish to knock them down.*⁶⁰

Ward, in contrast, dispassionately identifies the essential difference between Leyda's and Johnson's methods of using evidence. For Johnson, evidence becomes the foundation on which the narrative rests; for Leyda, it becomes the building blocks out of which the narrative develops:

*You and he have entirely different ways of working. You have felt put off sometimes because he does not want to deal with details until they are needed to fill in his constructive plan. You start with the details and build up.*⁶¹

Editions are not only time-bound artifacts reflecting the attitudes and values—literary and otherwise—of the moments in which they are conceived and constructed but also deeply human ones. Johnson's mantra in regard to his editorial project—"Our tools are method only"⁶²—is a wishful one, but it cannot be entirely true. In approaching their work on the "Master" documents, Todd, Bingham, and Johnson each applied the methods of their historical moments, but none dealt with these manuscripts in a merely technical or objective way. However, it would not have occurred to them—and least of all to Johnson, whose scholarly distance from Dickinson and training in the tenets of the New Bibliography seemed protection enough against the personal—to wonder about their unspoken desires and stakes in the editorial projects they engaged.

60 Ibid., Folder 2.

61 Ibid., Folder 3.

62 Thomas H. Johnson, "Establishing a Text: The Emily Dickinson Papers," *Studies in Bibliography* 5 (1952–1953): 32.

The questions they did not ask are our inheritance: Why do I make editions? What passions—of mine, of others—do they serve? In what ways do the editions we create have a life beyond us, and what effect do they have on the lives of readers and the shape of literary history?⁶³

Homage to Ralph W. Franklin

In the years that followed the simultaneous publication of Johnson's edition of Dickinson's poems and his biography, the narrative of Dickinson's poetic growth and her disappointment in love became more and more difficult to uncouple. This is the case even in R. W. Franklin's centennial edition of *The Master Letters* published in 1986 by Amherst College Press and which begins, "These three letters, which Emily Dickinson drafted to a man she called 'Master,' stand near the heart of her mystery."⁶⁴

Falling between Franklin's colossal labors on *The Manuscript Books of Emily Dickinson* (1981) and *The Poems of Emily Dickinson: A Variorum Edition* (1998), *The Master Letters* is a slim, elegant volume containing facsimiles of the three core manuscripts accompanied by spare, precisely rendered diplomatic transcriptions. Franklin's edition establishes an accurate text of the documents, revises their earlier editorial orderings, and conjectures more precise dates of composition based on new analyses of Dickinson's handwriting. In the headnotes preceding each of the three works, he presents information on the physical attributes of the manuscripts, including notes on paper types, measurements, and folding patterns; on the medium—ink or pencil—in which Dickinson composed and, in places, revised the text; and on the stages of composition of each work.

To an outsider to the world of scholarly editing, the simplest explanation for Franklin's brief foray into the region of Dickinson's letters may be that he was commissioned to edit them by the Amherst College Press, that his edition was, in short, a work for hire. To the denizen of the complex issues of editing works that never found their way into print in the author's lifetime, one can be virtually certain that something else drew him to the project. Did he wish to leave one beautiful clue as to what a complete

63 I am grateful to textual scholar and Whitman critic Matt Cohen for articulating these questions and bringing them forward into our discipline.

64 Franklin, introduction to *Master Letters*, p. 5.

facsimile edition of Dickinson's letters might have looked like had he undertaken it? Did he perhaps, as more and more I have come to believe, sense a connection—however slant and even slight—between the enigmatic documents that constitute the three “letters” and the intimate and ultimately private packets of poems Dickinson composed between 1858 and 1864?

In a 2001 letter to the head of the Amherst College Archives, Franklin, who had already reconstructed Dickinson's fascicles in a massive scholarly edition of more than 1,400 pages, wrote of *The Master Letters*, “Of all my scholarly efforts, this one might have the most energetic life”.⁶⁵ The very same letter opened, “I know of nothing to change in the Master Letters”.

Paradoxically, perhaps, it is the almost luminous clarity and textual accuracy of Franklin's 1986 edition of *The Master Letters* that allows us to take up new questions about them. While deeply indebted to Franklin's edition, in this new edition, I leave the “Master Letters” behind in order to re-imagine our responsibilities as readers and editors of the “Master documents”: these documents that may or may not be letters; these documents that may or may not have been addressed to someone in particular; these documents that were belatedly intercepted and opened by us; these documents that, though they seem to allow the dead to speak to the living again, at last present beautiful and overwhelming obstacles for decoding.

⁶⁵ See Franklin's 5 December 2001 email message to Daria D'Arienzo, then head of Archives & Special Collections, Amherst College Library, in the Amherst College Press correspondence files.

In this world, time, space, and physicality are not the emblems of a fall from grace, but the bounding conditions which turn gracefulness abounding. It is equally a world where the many departures from grace—our damaged orders and beings—appear in correspondingly determinate forms.

JEROME MCGANN, *on the nature of “documents”* ⁶⁶

Textual Introduction

From Letters to Documents: Imagining a New Edition of the “Master” Documents

For the textual scholar, the document and its strata of cultural and personal intervention holds the story, *is* the story. Yet in the case of the “Master Letters”, the longer I studied them, the clearer it became that at their most fundamental, ontological level, we don’t know what they are. The textual constellation composed by them includes works in different generic modes and different registers of preparation—from very rough draft to exquisite but revised fair copy. Other difficulties, too, accompany our encounters with them:

- We do not know the exact nature of their relations even to one another, whether, for instance, all were addressed to the same person, to different people, or to no human interlocutor at all.
- We do not know if these documents lay together in Dickinson’s papers and apart from her other works or if they were scattered at random among them.
- We do not know if other, possibly resolved copies of the “Master” documents ever circulated beyond Dickinson’s papers.
- And just as we do not know to whom, if anyone, Dickinson entrusted them in life, we do not know for sure the route they followed after her death.

Yet since these works are material phenomena, written across time on leaves of paper, they are also knowable in some ways. To take their deeper measure required that I first let go of them as the “Master Letters” and recover them as the “Master” documents.⁶⁷ This was only the beginning. It took much longer to realize that, with sections that scanned as perfect Dickinson poems and other sections that hovered somewhere between poetry and prose meditation, these unbound works preserved by Dickinson throughout her life were not—or not primarily—part of an extant correspondence nor part of a poetic set but something else, an experiment of another kind.

In addition to presenting new images and typographic

⁶⁶ Jerome J. McGann, *The Textual Condition* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1991), p. 9.

⁶⁷ The apparently radical claim that the “Master” documents are unique within Dickinson’s varied oeuvre is, I believe, justified. They represent the only significant constellation of works addressed to an unidentified (and I would argue unidentifiable) interlocutor and also saved among Dickinson’s own papers. Their kinship to the “Lord” letters—a body of materials containing fair and rough copy drafts of letters and prose meditations saved by Dickinson—seems closest, but even here the resemblance proves superficial, undone by the Lord letters’ specificity of address and beautiful but also limited aim: a testing of language entered into a lover’s discourse. Similarly, the handful of letter drafts to unidentified addressees that survive among Dickinson’s papers must also be set apart from the “Master” experiment; though often strikingly, hauntingly evocative, these late drafts do not coalesce into a sustained project.

facsimiles of the “Master” documents that report as fully and accurately as possible the texts and their conditions, this edition has three principal aims. The first is to unsettle the identity of the “Master” documents as “letters” and to re-draw the boundaries of the “Master” constellation determined by earlier editors through a rigorous description of their material and bibliographical forms, their predilection for crossing between genres, and their singular probing of address. The second aim is to propose the “Master” documents as an early writing experiment (ca. 1858–ca. 1861) that precedes and opens the fascicle experiment (ca. 1858–ca. 1864) and, even after its apparent end, endures as a stimulus within the fascicles as well as within the very different work Dickinson undertakes on the far side of the fascicles. To see the “Master” documents in this way is to understand them as both intrinsically related to Dickinson’s later projects and unassimilable to them; it is to see them as embodying what Sharon Cameron describes as a poetics of “choosing not choosing”.⁶⁸ A third aim is to return the “Master” documents as far as possible to the coordinates of space and to the flow of time in ways that will encourage us potentially to re-envisage the interplay of singular, elusive events—for example, Dickinson’s crossing out of a few lines or jotting down of a variant reading—and larger structural patterns in Dickinson’s work and in the arc of history itself. Towards this end, the structure of the edition is itself re-imagined as a cartograph or a “deep map”.⁶⁹

Re-drawing the Boundaries

Until now, editorial presentations of the three documents originally classified as “letters” have encouraged us to think of them as both “epistles” and an inviolable textual trinity. Leaving aside, for now, the vexed question of genre, still we may wonder, Did these documents lie or travel alone? Do they constitute the sole works of a single textual unit? Lexical references to a “Master” figure are, of course, not confined just to the three drafts found among Dickinson’s papers after

her death but instead occur across her oeuvre in poems composed between ca. 1859 and ca. 1863⁷⁰:

- *Sexton! My Master’s sleeping here.* (H 2, ca. spring 1859, Fascicle 3)
- *Mute – thy Coronation –* (A 825, ca. summer–autumn 1860, unbound)
- *A wife – at Daybreak / I shall be –* (A 826, ca. spring 1861; variant MS [A 116] copied ca. summer 1862; variant MS [H 219] copied and bound into Fascicle 32 ca. second half of 1863)
- *Sunset at Night – is natural –* (H 172, ca. autumn 1862, Fascicle 15)
- *The face I carry with / me – last –* (A 80-7, ca. autumn 1862, Fascicle 19)
- *Why make it doubt – it / hurts it so –* (H 219, ca. second half of 1863, Fascicle 32)
- *My Life had stood – a / Loaded Gun –* (H 131, 763, ca. late 1863, in Fascicle 34)

The first task has been to survey the boundaries of the “Master” constellation. What writings, epistolary and poetic, belong to it and only to it? Is there one “Master”, or are there many? Even as the identity—identities—of the

70 Having pursued the “Master” across Dickinson’s fascicles, one might wonder why I have not also followed “Daisy’s” footprints across these bound gatherings, especially those falling within the years ca. 1858 to ca. 1861. While the figure of the “Master” as both addressee and embodiment of alterity persists in Dickinson’s writings of these years both inside and outside the boundaries of the “Master” experiment, the figure of “Daisy” as speaker and interlocutor at least “slantly” associated with Dickinson herself appears in only two of the epistolary drafts of the “Master” experiment and nowhere outside of it. Rather, the “legions of daisies” found in the fascicle poems of these years seem to arise out of the shattering of “Daisy’s” singular lyric voice as it is heard in A 829 and A 828 and its dissemination across a vaster landscape that includes the nonhuman. No longer figures for the poet or her textual productions, these New World flowers, common and lowly, pointing to spring and paradise, subject to vanishing, animate all of nature. Their elusiveness seems connected to their agency in the world; their hiddenness is the origin of their power. While none of the “Daisy” poems meets all of the criteria for inclusion in this edition (i.e., unbound, uncirculated works composed between ca. 1858–ca. 1861 and rhetorically addressed to a “Master”), many appear to be private documents that, while bound into fascicles, did not—so far as we know—circulate beyond Dickinson’s papers. This is in itself interesting and noteworthy for our methodological tests for the “Master” documents, themselves sequestered from epistolary exchange. In this context, two of the “Daisy” poems call out for special notice. *If those I loved were lost* (ca. summer 1858) exists both as an initial draft, composed in pencil and containing cancellations and alternatives, and a fair copy bound into Fascicle 1. Dickinson’s decision to retain the draft of this poem after making a fascicle copy is unusual and may link this draft to the two other extant drafts from these years, *Mute – thy Coronation –* and *Did the Harebell / loose her girdle*, the first of which is included in the present “Master” constellation. The poem beginning *Sexton! My Master’s sleeping here.* (ca. spring 1859) is the only example of a “Daisy” poem that also alludes to a “Master” figure. Here, however, the “Master” is beyond address, and the “Daises” are silent markers of his grave site.

68 Cameron’s *Choosing Not Choosing: Dickinson’s Fascicles* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992) remains among the most searching analyses of the fascicles and, more generally, of Dickinson’s poetics.

69 On the concept of the “deep map”, see, especially, David J. Bodenhamer, John Corrigan, and Trevor M. Harris, eds., *Deep Maps and Spatial Narratives* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2015).

“Master” continues to elude us, so do the still more mysterious nature of the documents and the relations among them remain difficult to grasp. Are these poems companions to the more epistolary drafts—and, possibly, part of a larger project that may have changed forms over time? Long thought of as the remnants of a lover’s discourse in which a reciprocal flow of communications—now lost—once joined writer and addressee, the “Master” documents may also be strange proof of the always asymmetrical relations between body and soul, sender and receiver, writer and reader, poem and letter, manuscript and work.

While I am now convinced that many of the seven documents above—as well as others not referring directly to a “Master” but drawing on the same lexicon as the “Master” documents—are part of a larger “Master” constellation, I have been conservative in adding to the present constellation. Here only two poems, *Mute – thy Coronation* – (A 825, ca. summer–autumn 1860) and *A wife – at Daybreak* (A 826, ca. spring 1861), enter the body of the edition proper. In both cases, the rationale is material and temporal. First, like the three epistolary documents that still form the core of the “Master” constellation, neither poem ever circulated to or among recipients beyond the writer herself, as far as we know. Rather, both survive in a draft state and among the unbound works in Dickinson’s private archive. Second, Dickinson composed both between ca. 1858 and ca. 1861 and thus inside the arc of the three core drafts and in what seems to have been the first, most concentrated phase of the “Master” project that, after 1861, either ended or took another form.

Something further needs to be said about the intertwining criteria used in selecting A 825 and A 826 for inclusion here. Unlike the latest period of Dickinson’s writing, in which drafts in both verse and prose abound, only a few drafts survive from the period between ca. 1858 and ca. 1861. During these years, Dickinson appears to have given over much time to the editorial task of organizing her work. This labor is reflected positively in the gathering, copying, and binding of poems into fascicles and negatively in the discarding and destruction of what were surely countless drafts and experiments. Given what must have been Dickinson’s seemingly systematic elimination of most of her preliminary and intermediate drafts from these years, it follows that those drafts that she did

preserve from this period she saved intentionally because of their significance to her, whether personal, writerly, or both. It seems equally significant that the two poem drafts included among the “Master” documents were both saved by the poet but not entered into the fascicles. Although Dickinson’s authorial intentions with regard to the fascicles are hard to read, the bibliographical codes of the early, pre-1861 fascicles—especially the absence of variant readings in the early fascicles—may suggest that Dickinson initially prepared the fascicles for wider circulation, a circulation they likely never enjoyed. By withholding both *Mute – thy Coronation* – (A 825) and *A wife – at Daybreak* (A 826) from the fascicles—in the case of *Mute –*, forever, and in the case of *A wife –*, until 1863—Dickinson seems to invest them with the higher degree of privacy also associated with the other “Master” documents. Only after, I believe, the period of experimentation with the “Master” formula (ca. 1858–ca. 1861), precisely in 1863, does Dickinson revisit *A wife –*, making yet another copy—a fair copy—and folding the revised poem into Fascicle 32.

The boundaries indicated by the date range ca. 1858 to ca. 1861 not only mark the advent of the first and last extant “Master” documents; they also point to a far larger material shift in Dickinson’s work. While Dickinson likely composes (or copies) the first extant “Master” document in the spring of 1858, just before she begins copying and binding fascicles in the summer of that same year, her transcription of the last extant “Master” document coincides with the single most important formal transition in Dickinson’s writing. As Franklin has observed and as all close readers of Dickinson can confirm, in or around 1861, Dickinson’s relationship to her writings changes in a fundamental way:

When Dickinson resumed fascicle making in early 1861, the goal was no longer finished poems, as it had been up until the summer of 1860. Although her output was reasonably continuous, her method had changed. Not only did alternative readings begin to appear, but sometimes the manuscripts were a single leaf with a single poem, not a bifolium with many. She now left many sheets and leaves unbound. [. . .] By early 1862, the fascicle idea had itself come apart.⁷¹

71 R. W. Franklin, introduction to *The Poems of Emily Dickinson: Variorum Edition*, 3 vols. (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1998), p. 22.

Is it merely coincidental that the first, most concentrated iteration of the “Master” project also evaporates at this time? By 1862, Dickinson’s prose and verse clearly exhibit the operant features of the experimental work belonging to the period of her highest style. These years would see an increased torsion of semantic order, marked elision and oblique reference, the integration of multiple voices, the pliancy of genre crossing between prose and verse, and a vigilant resistance to closure. At this temporal horizon, the evidence seems to suggest that the “Master” project—which, in so many ways, foretells the work that follows—no longer needs to continue as a separate experiment but may now be absorbed into the larger and now more mainstream dynamics of Dickinson’s work.

The “Master” poems that sporadically appear across fascicles composed or bound after 1861 seem to have a retrospective relationship to the five documents composed between ca. 1858 and ca. 1861. There are many touch-points among them, but the later poems arise out of a changed mental landscape. They do, however, share an important condition with those not entered into fascicles: as far as the evidence will take us, none of them was ever shared with a correspondent or another reader. The difficult trust of this privacy is perhaps best witnessed in Dickinson’s treatment of *The face I carry with / me – last –*, a poem composed around the autumn of 1862. Written on a leaf, rather than a bifolium sheet, and folded into thirds, Dickinson initially intended to send the manuscript to Susan Dickinson, to whom she addressed it on the verso. Whether she sent it to Susan and later recalled it is unknown. Yet since no other copy of the poem survived among the manuscripts in Susan’s large collection and sewing holes and pin impressions on this manuscript tell us that Dickinson bound it into Fascicle 19, here even the desire to share the poem with her closest, most intimate friend appears to have been eclipsed by her still greater need to withhold it.⁷²

72 Ellen Louise Hart and Martha Nell Smith include this poem (no. 64) in their 1998 edition *Open Me Carefully* (Ashfield, MA: Paris Press; hereafter cited as *OMC*), and readers should consult their account. While I stand by my reading of the material evidence, the erasure of Susan Dickinson’s name is problematic. While it is possible that Dickinson erased it when she decided to change the destination of the poem, she did not typically erase text, and it is more likely that the individual responsible for erasing other instances of Susan’s name—possibly Mabel Loomis Todd or Austin Dickinson—was also responsible for this erasure. If Dickinson did not erase Susan’s name, she may have wished to preserve a record of the poem’s potential addresses or of the change of address itself.

Although the period immediately preceding the emergence of the “Master” documents—the purportedly textually blank year of 1857—remains inaccessible, it is nonetheless possible to survey the near and far boundaries of the “Master” experiment. The “Master” documents occupy a liminal space between Dickinson’s early and later epistolary poetics. In the “Master” documents, the survival of the linguistic fluency of her earlier epistolary works is less marked than her radical departure from its excessive, virtuoso performance. Furthermore, the reliance on the social contexts and code behaviors of Victorian letter writing in Dickinson’s early epistolary exchanges are cast off in the “Master” documents: by their rejection of seriality in the most essential sense (unlike the ongoing, sequential nature of correspondence, what is transmitted in them is the impossibility of transmission) and in their exclusion from an economy of keepsakes or talismans.⁷³ At the same time, just as the “Master” documents only partially resemble the works that precede them, so they also stand apart from the works that follow. For while there are many more stylistic associations between the “Master” documents and Dickinson’s later works—both are marked by ellipsis and disjunction, opacity and transience—a signal difference nonetheless prevails: deliberately reserved from the circuit of exchange, there is at last a breach of the referential pact, the *meter*, between speaker-writer and reader-addressee, between “I” and “You” through which the Other enters to speak at the limits of ecstasy and insurgence.⁷⁴

The specific trajectories of the “Master” experiment itself may be described in the following way. Initially, the “Master” experiment enclosed its subjects, protecting and

73 For important readings of Dickinson’s letters and epistolary poetics, see especially the following chapters in *Reading Emily Dickinson’s Letters: Critical Essays*, ed. Jane Donahue Eberwein and Cindy MacKenzie (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2009): Cindy MacKenzie’s “‘This is my letter to the World’: Emily Dickinson’s Epistolary Poetics” (pp. 11–27); Paul Crumbley’s “Dickinson’s Correspondence and the Politics of Gift-Based Circulation” (pp. 28–55); Stephanie A. Tingley’s “‘Blossoms on the Brain’: Women’s Culture and the Poetics of Emily Dickinson’s Correspondence” (pp. 56–79); and Martha Nell Smith’s “A Hazard of a Letter’s Fortunes: Epistolarity and the Technology of Audience in Emily Dickinson’s Correspondences” (pp. 239–56). Marietta Messmer’s argument concerning the primacy of Dickinson’s letters in her oeuvre is compelling; see especially her *A Vice for Voices: Reading Emily Dickinson’s Correspondence* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2001).

74 In place of “I” and “You”, I was tempted to write “I” and “Thou” to underscore the strange holiness of the pact. While Dickinson does not employ the pronoun “Thou” in these documents, her use of “It” may come very close to “Thou”.

isolating them from the larger world and remaining within the bounds of the simply epistolary. This is demonstrated in A 827, where the address—“Dear Master”—seems to seek an individual in the world and where the title “Master” seems to cover a mortal name. There is here a rhythmic alteration of “Master” and “You” across the text that fuses these addressees into one and that underscores the singularity, fullness, and vulnerability of the mortal being to whom she writes. At the same time, the relationship between prose and verse in A 827 bears few signs of conflict. Prose flows into verse and verse back into prose so seamlessly that there is no jarring moment of enjambment, no disconnection between “sounding” and “meaning”. While A 827 may still belong to the world of human messages, of private communications between a single writer and a single reader, in the documents that follow A 827, the structure of enclosure that operates in the early missive, enveloping speaker and addressee, is fissured by the break-in of an alterity whose origins are untraceable.

The rupture between A 827 and the “Master” documents that follow is most clearly marked in the third and fifth documents. In the third document, A 829, Dickinson no longer addresses a “Master” to draw him closer to her in a lover’s discourse but rather to preserve his (and her) hiddenness and remoteness. Here the poverty and insupportability of personal pronouns is exposed in Dickinson’s movement from “Master”/“He” to “It”, from name to non-name, from possessive human identity to its shattering. In the fifth and ultimate document of the constellation, A 828, a “Master” now shot through with otherness is again addressed, but now a new relation between prose and verse obtains. Unlike the smooth alteration between prose and verse currents found in A 827, verse now erupts inside of prose, transgressing the measure of writing and transporting writer, speaker, addressee, and reader beyond the bounds of discourse and nature.

Looking backward from this far vantage point, the “Master” experiment is disclosed as an exploration of otherness in love and writing where those terms are interchangeable. Dickinson’s (unaccountable) act of saving—archiving—the “Master” documents, her refusal to circulate them in her time, ensured that they would transcend their author’s original intent, original audience, and original enunciation and that they would break free from the circuit of writer and addressee to become not messages exchanged but worlds opened.

Taking stock of the material and philological dynamics of the “Master” documents and their relationship to Dickinson’s other writings leads us inevitably to consider the different forms of dialogue Dickinson engages in her work: the interior dialogue that unfolds in the same mind; the dialogue between other minds; the dialogue between versions of a single poem, between poems composed across a sheet or a fascicle, between fascicles; the dialogue between poems and epistolary writings; the dialogue between unbound and bound writings—all of which unfold within and across time itself. In the relatively smaller arc of a “Master dialogic”, Dickinson boldly experiments with genre, address, language, intimacy, and distance. And though never circulated in their “Master” forms, all these experiments remained in and around Dickinson’s desk, part of her own, highly private method of preserving, and ultimately archiving, the other until after her death.

The “Master” documents entail significant range in genre: two short poems (A 825 and A 826), the intermediate draft of an epistle that scans as verse (A 827), a preliminary draft in prose without salutation (A 829), and a late-stage draft of an epistolary experiment in prose and verse (A 828). The generic hybridity within each “Master” document as well as across the constellation of “Master” documents, though long recognized, remains bibliographically unsettling. On the one hand, it affirms that the documents, or rather parts of the text they carry, may rightfully claim a place in editions of both her letters and her poems; on the other hand, it reveals that each of these editorially imagined homes is necessarily provisional and imperfect. Though not bound together with different colored strings like Dickinson’s fascicles, and though perhaps not meant to be held fast for all time, associations at once material and philological among the “Master” documents manifestly connect them. This material unity asserts at least an equal, perhaps even greater claim for representation, even as it reminds us of the constant tension between autonomy and intertextuality in Dickinson’s works. At once part of and apart from the drift of her other writings in prose and verse, the “Master” documents call out for a new form of edition that preserves their unique bibliographical identity ca. 1858 to ca. 1861 as well as their multiple and even contradictory relations to the other materials in Dickinson’s evolving archive.

Dating the “Master” Documents

As is the case with almost all of the documents in Dickinson’s archive, the “Master” documents were left undated by their author. This circumstance coupled with their lack of reference to clearly identifiable external events—a condition they share with much of Dickinson’s lyric poetry—leaves us to derive dates chiefly from the analysis of her handwriting and paper evidence. Like all editors and readers of Dickinson’s writings, I am deeply indebted to Thomas H. Johnson and Theodora Ward’s early studies of Dickinson’s hand as well as to Ralph W. Franklin’s more recent analysis of Dickinson’s changing forms of ligation and her patterns of paper use. In preparing the present edition, I have spent many hours following their tracks and carrying on their work by digitally collating Dickinson’s letterforms in the years between ca. 1856 and ca. 1862 and comparing each of the “Master” documents against a small but important set of manuscript witnesses positively datable to these years.⁷⁵

In the end, however, an openness to uncertainty must necessarily accompany the effort of approximating dates for these writings: no date, perhaps, may be assigned without some degree of doubt, and almost no date may be judged final. Every scholar engaged in such an endeavor has felt this. Indeed, Thomas Johnson’s “apprehensive skepticism” of the early 1950s rings truer than his later exaggerated assertions about the “great reliability” of handwriting in establishing an accurate chronology for Dickinson’s writings: “To establish a text for Emily Dickinson in terms of exact chronology will never be possible. [...] [In cases where] the evidence [for dating] must derive solely from handwriting and from paper groups [...] [it] cannot do

75 There is something almost mystical about Ward’s telegraphic notes on Dickinson’s handwriting and her own hand-drawn charts of Dickinson’s capitals now sheltering in the Houghton Library. We see materialized here not only the countless hours of hidden labor involved in chronicling the gradual emerging, alteration, and sometimes vanishing of particular letterforms in Dickinson’s alphabet but also something of the inner necessity that led Ward to the work. Like the medieval copyist, Ward’s work was devotional, dedicated to incarnating Dickinson’s alphabet, to making sacrament, even, each letter. For studies of Dickinson’s handwriting, see Johnson’s “Establishing a Text”, pp. 21–32; Theodora Ward’s “Study of the Handwriting” in “Appendix D” of *Emily Dickinson’s Letters to Dr. and Mrs. Josiah Gilbert Holland* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1951) and her “Characteristics of the Handwriting” in *Poems* (1955); and R. W. Franklin’s “The Emily Dickinson Fascicles”, *Studies in Bibliography* 36 (1983): 1–20.

more than suggest *areas of time* [emphasis added]”.⁷⁶

In addition to the general problems attending to the dating of Dickinson’s writings, two particular quandaries further trouble the dating of the “Master” documents. First, the year 1858, long thought to be the year in which the first extant document in the present constellation (A 827) was composed as well as the year in which Dickinson began binding fascicles, is preceded by an enigmatic aporia: not a single manuscript witness from Dickinson’s oeuvre has been dated to the year 1857. Where are the material traces and remnants of Dickinson’s preparation of the more than forty poems she apparently copied in the summer and autumn of 1858 and ultimately bound, among others, into the early fascicles? Where are the letters to the friends with whom she had corresponded in the mid-1850s, including Susan Dickinson, Jane Humphrey, Josiah and Sophia Holland, and John Graves? Was 1857 a year empty of writing?

Whatever the case may be, the evolution of letterforms after April 1856, when we know Dickinson wrote to John Graves, and late August 1858, when she wrote Mary Haven, is not traceable. Although the handwriting of 1858 is sufficiently different from that of 1856 to suggest the passage of a year, a gap in the material record exists, and A 827 seems to fall within it.⁷⁷ The anomaly year of 1857 remains a *prima facie* indication that the dating of Dickinson’s work in this period is never to be taken as settled. Thus,

76 See Thomas H. Johnson, “Establishing a Text: The Emily Dickinson Papers”, in *Art and Error: Modern Textual Editing*, ed. Ronald Gottesman and Scott Bennett (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1970), p. 153. Johnson’s essay was originally published in *Studies in Bibliography* 5 (1952–1953): 21–32. At best, the margin of error Johnson imagined might measure “several months”; at worst, it could “extend through two to three years” (p. 151). At Princeton, Johnson’s maps of letters made from photostats of Dickinson’s manuscripts “handled, arranged, cut, and pasted onto charts for the purposes of comparing formations of letters, line slants, the length of ascenders and descenders [...] and so on” tell the story of how he moved from “apprehensive skepticism” about the possibility of dating manuscripts on the basis of handwriting to the belief that “great reliability can be placed upon a chronology that derives from it”. Yet handwriting evidence is especially vulnerable to unreliability: a form of visual behavior whose evolutions can to some extent be followed, handwriting can be affected by many things—some mechanical, such as the nature of the writing instrument, the quality of the paper, the position of the writer; others environmental, such as the degree of light or cold; and still others somatic, such as states of physical well-being, emotional moods.

77 In the Graves letter from April 1856, we see many of the same letterforms as those found in A 827, including, importantly, the (two) forms of *H* and the downward left-angled quotation marks Franklin associates with 1858. In the same letter, we also find the *T* moving towards the triangular form it takes in 1858 and beyond, though a looser form also persists, even dominates. Yet the difference can be starkly seen in two formations: in 1856, the ascender of the *d* in *and* is always curved leftward, and only the final two letters of the *you* are linked.

while like Leyda, Johnson, and Franklin, I believe that A 827 was likely composed in the spring of 1858, it is at least possible that it belongs not to the spring of that year but instead to the spring of 1857. If this were the case, the calendar, not just for A 827 but for many documents currently dated to 1858, might fall backward.

Second, as earlier editors—and Franklin in particular—have noted, the exact dividing line between documents belonging to 1861 and those datable to 1862 is difficult to establish. At this time, the aggregate behavior of letterforms cannot be definitively established beyond some general periods of production, with some documents almost certainly datable to 1861 containing letterforms thought to evolve only later in 1862 and other documents almost certainly datable to 1862 exhibiting letterforms more characteristic of those from 1861. This mixing of letterforms from 1861 and 1862 occurs in A 828, here positioned as the last extant document in the “Master” constellation. And while this hybridity helps to confirm that A 828 follows A 829 rather than, as Johnson and Leyda believed, precedes it, it also opens up the possibility that A 828 belongs not to the summer of 1861, as Franklin believes, but closer to the dividing line between autumn or early winter of that year or even, perhaps, to early 1862.

For the reasons outlined above, the dates given to the documents in the present “Master” constellation remain provisional; they encompass *areas* (to borrow Johnson’s resonant, even prescient term) rather than *spots* of time. The notational system employed here to indicate the dates of the “Master” documents also underscores their openness to and dynamic evolution over time. While traditionally, the dates assigned to each work point only to the moment of its composition or copying, here descriptions of authorial actions registered materially on the documents are given to foster awareness of the multiple dates and temporalities—of drafting, re-reading, revising, copying; of folding, sending, archiving—at play in a given work. Finally, while the evidence of handwriting and paper cannot be conclusive for dating, it can guide us in meaningful ways; the notes below briefly present some of this evidence for readers to assess for themselves.⁷⁸

78 With the exception of the anomaly year 1857, to which no documents have been positively dated, we have at least one and often more than one positively datable specimen of Dickinson’s handwriting from every year of her writing life. In Dickinson’s case, almost yearly changes in certain capital letters, variations in certain lowercase letters, patterns in letter combinations, and patterns of ligation are useful markers for dating.

Dear Master / I am ill – (A 827) was composed, or possibly copied from an earlier (initial or intermediate) draft (not extant), and revised on the same occasion, ca. spring 1858.

- Bingham, *Home* (1955): ca. early 1860s
- Johnson, *Letters* (1958): ca. 1858
- Leyda, *Years and Hours* (1960): early spring 1858⁷⁹
- Franklin, *Master Letters* (1986): spring 1858

With the exception of Bingham, who dates A 827 to the “early 1860s”, Johnson, Leyda, and Franklin all date A 827 to the shibboleth year 1858 and thus to the months just before Dickinson began copying and binding fascicle poems.⁸⁰ While only a few extant manuscripts can be securely dated to this year,⁸¹ the case for dating A 827 to spring 1858 can be made through a comparison of the handwriting with that of two manuscripts to Mary Haven, HCL Haven 1 and HCL Haven 2, both of which are reliably datable to particular seasons of that year and one of which can be dated more narrowly to the month of August (HCL Haven 2).

In her “Characteristics of the Handwriting”, Ward offers the following entry on the handwriting of 1858:

Very slanting; letters sharp, words spread more widely.
d: two strokes for initial letter; for final the one-stroke d with ascender to right reappears for a short time.
h and l: hooked at top.
*T: the evolution of this letter, begun in 1855, continues toward a triangular form.*⁸²

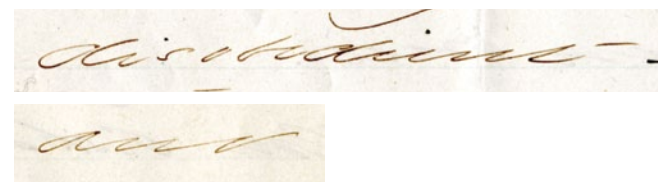


Fig. 2. Initial and final *d*, ca. spring 1858 (from A 827, lines 34, 11, details)

79 In his cataloguing notes, Leyda proposed only the more general date of “1858?” for A 827.

80 Bingham had access only to about a third of Dickinson’s manuscripts, a circumstance that hindered her attempts at dating.

81 In addition to the two autograph letters from Dickinson to Mary Haven cited here (HCL Haven 1 and HCL Haven 2), at least one autograph letter to Susan Gilbert Dickinson can also be dated with confidence to this year: HCL L3 (26 September 1858). For the dating of the letters to Susan Gilbert Dickinson, see Hart and Smith, *OMC* (1998).

82 See Ward’s “Characteristics of the Handwriting” in *Poems* (1955).



Fig. 3. Hooked *h* and *l*, ca. spring 1858 (from A 827, lines 43, 16, details)



Fig. 4. Triangular *T*, ca. spring 1858 (from A 827, line 36, detail)

To these salient characteristics, Franklin adds three more features specifically associated with 1858: 1) the capital *H* made with three separate strokes; 2) quotation marks with a left downward slant; and 3) the appearance for the first time of *you* in a fully ligated form⁸³:



Fig. 5. Letterforms and punctuation, ca. spring 1858 (from A 827, lines 8, 19, 4, details)

While A 827, Haven 1, and Haven 2 all share the strongly slanting letters, sharpness in letter outline, and widening spaces between words associated with Dickinson's 1858 hand, as well as many of the more particular traits associated with the year, together they may also illustrate the subtle continuum along which Dickinson's hand evolved even over the course of several months. Haven 1, likely datable to the early summer, is pivotal, exhibiting letterforms that look both backward to those in A 827 and forward to those in Haven 2. Here small, almost imperceptible changes—for example, the vacillation between two forms of *l*, one resembling the straighter *l*'s seen in A 827, a second looking forward to the more undulant *l* of Haven 2—are the subtle signs of a new hand overtaking an earlier one. By the time Dickinson composes Haven 2 in late summer of 1858, the distinctive right-rising ascender of the *d* in *and* present in both Haven 1 and in A 827 is already disappearing, replaced by a two-stroke *d* with a rounded body and separate ascender. While not conclusive, the progression, falling away, and subtle evolution of

letterforms seen in A 827, Haven 1, and Haven 2 support the hypothesis that the “spring” Dickinson alludes to in the interior of A 827 is in fact the spring of 1858.

Mute – thy Coronation – (A 825) was composed, or possibly copied from an earlier (likely initial) draft (not extant), and revised (alternate added) on the same occasion, ca. summer to autumn 1860.

- Todd and Bingham, *Bolts of Melody* (1945): undated
- Johnson, *Poems* (1955): ca. 1859
- Leyda: undated⁸⁴
- Franklin, *Poems* (1998): ca. second half of 1860⁸⁵

Franklin's work in the course of preparing the variorum of Dickinson's poems led to the shifting forward of a number of dates originally proposed by Johnson. This is the case with A 825. Although Franklin does not discuss his reasons for re-dating this manuscript in particular, they may be deduced by an examination of the handwriting traits and through a comparison of A 825 to two manuscript witnesses certainly dated to 1860: a letter to Mary Bowles (A 659) from the very beginning of the year (1 January) and a letter to Susan Gilbert (HCL [B 61]) composed in August, thus a little past the height of the year.

Although Ward's notes indicate there were no important changes in letterforms between Dickinson's handwriting of 1859 and that of 1860, the mixture of traits from the handwriting of 1859 and 1861 found in A 825 is at least suggestive of an 1860 composition date. Among these traits are Dickinson's use of two forms of *e* in final letters—one a narrow loop associated with the years up until 1859, the other similar to the *e* in roman type and first occurring in 1859—and her formation of the *g* and *y* featuring the straight descenders associated with the writing of 1861. That A 825 belongs to a year before 1861 is, moreover, suggested by the ligation patterns in the definite article *the*: as Franklin reports, in 1861 Dickinson's use of a lowercase *the* consisting of a *t* detached from a ligated *he*,

84 The poem is not included in Leyda's *Years and Hours*; his cataloguing notes for A 825 do not include a date, though they do tentatively associate this document with the “Master” constellation: “ED to ‘Master’?”

85 In her recent critical edition of Dickinson's poems, *Dickinson's Poems: As She Preserved Them* (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2016), Cristanne Miller follows Franklin's dating of this poem.

83 See Franklin's notes on dating in his introduction to *Master Letters*, pp. 8–9.

a form found throughout 1858 to 1860, shifted to a form in which all three letters were joined. The later, ligated form does not appear in A 825.

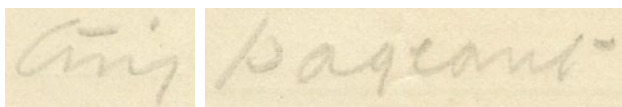


Fig. 6. Straight *y* and *g* letterforms, ca. summer–autumn 1860 (from A 825, lines 3, 6, details)

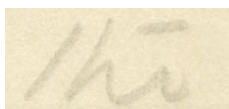


Fig. 7. Form of *the* before 1861 (from A 825, line 6, detail)

The 1 January 1860 letter to Mary Bowles (A 659) and the August 1860 letter to Susan Dickinson (HCL B 61) permit us further speculation about the time of the year in which A 825 was composed, while once again revealing the continuum along which letterforms evolve over the course of a year. While the letter to Mary Bowles—composed on the very first day of the new year—adopts the straight descender of the *g* associated with 1861 but still manifests the left-sweeping descender of the *y* associated with 1859, the letter to Susan Dickinson—composed almost eight months later—features predominantly straight descenders in both *g* and *y*. Given this evolution, it is reasonable to assign A 825 to the second half, or summer to autumn, of 1860.

The remaining three documents in the constellation—A 829, A 826, and A 828—all likely date to ca. 1861. Each exhibits the distinctive handwriting of 1861, serving almost as embodiments of Ward’s notes in “Characteristics of the Handwriting” with their expression of the visual distance between this new hand and the hands that preceded it:

Noticeable change in appearance: letters elongated and uneven, as if written with an excess of energy. Strongly slanted. Tendency towards separation of letters, a few words of four or five letters being entirely unligated. Some capitals, such as A and C exaggerated in size.

*d: both forms used, one stroke form having ascender to left.
e: all three forms used.*

g and y mostly straight.

*t: cross strokes often long and sweeping.*⁸⁶

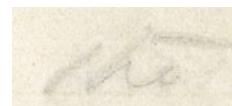


Fig. 8. Sweeping crossbar of *t*, ca. late winter–spring 1861 (from A 829, line 20, detail)

Given the many shared attributes across the handwriting of these documents, the more significant issue concerns the probable order of their composition.

While it may not yield definitive results, Franklin’s discovery of a shift in Dickinson’s construction of the definite article *the* across 1861 offers an important key to establishing this order. The unusually large number of certainly dated letters to Sam and Mary Bowles in this year, along with the disposition of the Bowles manuscript witnesses across the late winter, spring, summer, and autumn of 1861, help to confirm this shift in *the* detected by Franklin while also allowing us to propose an order (and sometimes more precise dates) for A 829, A 826, and A 828.⁸⁷

Oh’ did I offend it – (A 829) was drafted and likely revised on the same occasion, ca. late winter to spring 1861.

- Bingham, *Home* (1955): ca. early 1860s
- Johnson, *Letters* (1958): early 1862?
- Leyda, *Years and Hours* (1960): February? 1861⁸⁸
- Franklin, *Master Letters* (1986): early 1861

⁸⁶ See Ward’s “Characteristics of the Handwriting” in *Poems* (1955), p. liv.

⁸⁷ While at least one letter to Samuel Bowles (L 242) and one to Mary Bowles (L 244) have long been datable to December 1861, the independent re-dating on the basis of material and contextual evidence by Franklin in 1998 and Alfred Habegger in 2001 of a number of other letters to the Bowleses significantly added to the pool of witnesses against which A 829, A 826, and A 828 may be compared. By working forward through five manuscript witnesses from the pool of letters to Samuel and Mary Bowles (a letter-poem sent to Samuel Bowles in early 1861 [L 219; A 692], two more letters to Samuel Bowles written, respectively, in the spring [L 250; A 678] and early summer [L 251; A 679], and finally a letter to Mary Bowles written around 20 December 1861 [L 244; A 672] on the occasion of Mary’s delivery of an infant son in New York City), we see clearly manifested the evolution of Dickinson’s *the* from its partly to its fully ligated form. In A 692, dated “early in the year”, only the form of *the* in which the *t* remains detached from the *he* occurs; in A 678 and A 679, both forms occur, though in A 678 the earlier form remains dominant whereas in A 679 the two forms appear in equal distribution; and in A 672, written on the verge of 1862, the later form is used in all but one instance.

⁸⁸ In his cataloguing notes for A 829, Leyda does not propose any date.

While Johnson dated A 829 with a certain degree of uncertainty to early 1862, his reasons were, as discussed in the “Historical Introduction”, likely more biographical than textual. Led by his desire to associate the draft with what he believed was a profound crisis in Dickinson’s emotional and artistic life caused by Reverend Wadsworth’s departure for San Francisco, Johnson may have briefly looked away from the material evidence. Leyda and Franklin independently date A 829 to 1861. While Leyda believed A 829 was the final document in the constellation, following A 828, Franklin’s work reverses this order. After completing his work on the variorum, Franklin returned to this document, revising his original dating (first proposed in 1986) of A 829 to “early 1861” to “spring” of that year.

The trending of *the* forms in A 829—eight with ligation, six without—almost certainly places the most cryptic of the “Master” documents somewhere between the late winter and spring of 1861, but it is difficult to pinpoint the date more precisely.

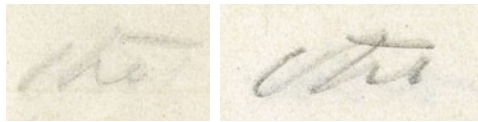


Fig. 9. Trending of *the* forms, ca. late winter–spring 1861 (from A 829, lines 14, 81, details)

A comparison of A 829 with two of the recently re-dated Bowles letters—A 692 (early 1861) and A 678 (spring 1861)—adds weight to the 1861 date but casts some doubt on the season of composition. Like A 829, the spring letter to Bowles exhibits a mixed pattern of the instances of the article *the*, with some fully ligated, others not. Yet the spring letter to Bowles also presents mixed forms for the *d*—some with the left-curling ascender, others with a right-leaning ascender—unseen in A 829, where only the first, atavistic form of *d* appears, as well as three forms of *y*, a trait associated with Dickinson’s writing in 1862 and absent from A 829. Two additional features of A 829 may also look backward to the earlier Bowles letter: first, the use of a strikingly similar mark of punctuation—a right-angled dash made far above the line—that follows the opening clause; and second, marked instances of *t* that feature crossbars sitting directly atop their stems.

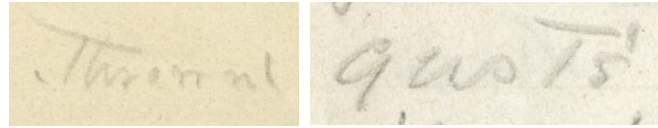


Fig. 10. *t* crossbar atop stem, ca. early 1861 (from A 692, line 14, detail); *t* crossbar atop stem, ca. late winter–spring 1861 (from A 829, line 17, detail)

Coupled with the complete absence of internal referents that might confirm the season, the contradictory handwriting traits in A 829 seem to support a slight widening of the date range. This evidence allows us to conclude that A 829 probably opens the sequence of extant “Master” documents from 1861, followed by A 826 and A 828.

A wife – at Daybreak (A 826) was composed, or possibly copied from an earlier (likely initial) draft (not extant), and revised (alternates added) on the same occasion, ca. spring 1861.

- Bingham: _____⁸⁹
- Johnson, *Poems* (1955): ca. 1862
- Leyda: undated⁹⁰
- Franklin, *Poems* (1998): ca. spring 1861⁹¹

The almost mirror-like resemblance of A 829 and A 826 is in part a function of their textual and material states: both are drafts, though A 826 is likely a second or third rather than a first draft, and in both the scale of Dickinson’s alphabet and the level of visual embellishment are

89 Bingham did not publish A 826 or any of the versions of this work; the first published source of A 826 was in Johnson’s *Poems* (1955).

90 Leyda does not print this poem in *Years and Hours*; his cataloguing notes for A 826 do not include a date, nor do they directly associate this document with the “Master” constellation, though the cataloguing numbers are suggestive.

91 Miller includes the fascicle version of this poem in *Dickinson’s Poems: As She Preserved Them* but alludes to this unbound version in a note; she does not reproduce A 826 in “Loose Poems”.

slightly reduced.⁹² Their close association in time is suggested, moreover, in the sharing of certain distinct letterforms: the *d*, with its left-curving ascender; the *p*, with its looped descender. Yet by looking *through* the draft state of the manuscripts to their more elemental letterforms, subtle differences appear that help clarify the order in which they were composed. Here again, Dickinson's mixed use in A 826 of both forms of *the*, with the later, fully ligated form in clear dominance, along with the fleeting presence of a third form of *y* more common in documents from later in 1861 and 1862, suggests a slightly later date of composition than that proposed for A 829.

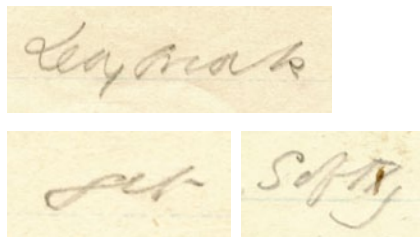


Fig. 11. Three forms of *y*, ca. spring 1861 (from A 826, lines 1, 4, 14, details)

Paper evidence further strengthens the case for dating of A 826 to spring 1861 and to a period of time after the composition of A 829. Indeed, one striking material feature of this document upon which Dickinson composed A 826 (and of A 828, which follows) is the fine laid, cream, blue-ruled stationery embossed with a decorative frame containing a queen's head above the letter *L*. In 1861, Dickinson used this stationery with marked frequency beginning in the spring and throughout the summer months, when she likely copied all twenty-nine poems bound into Fascicle 9 onto sheets of this paper as well as two poems eventually bound in Fascicle 11 and seven poems bound in Fascicle 12. Significantly, Dickinson also drew from the same stock of paper when she turned to compose A 828.

92 These manuscripts are important for another reason. Given the near total absence of extant working drafts for the period of 1858 to 1861, the survival of both A 829, a rough draft, and A 826, an intermediate draft, along with the pool of reliably dated fair copy manuscripts offers us a rare opportunity to study the relationship between Dickinson's drafting hand and her copying hand. In setting manuscripts in three states side by side and looking *through* the visual differences produced, perhaps, by different speeds or moods of composing associated with different stages of composition, we see the persistence of the telltale attributes associated with the writing of 1861: the marked slant, the forms, albeit in different scales, of *C*, *d*, *y*, and *t*.

Master . / If you saw a bullet (A 828) was composed, or possibly copied from an earlier draft (initial or intermediate, not extant), and revised both during composition or copying and again on a separate but temporally close occasion, ca. summer to autumn 1861.

- Todd, *Letters* (1894, 1931): 1885
- Bingham, *Home* (1955): ca. 1861
- Leyda, *Years and Hours* (1960): January? 1861⁹³
- Johnson, *Letters* (1958): ca. 1861
- Franklin, *Master Letters* (1986); *Poems* (1998), verse lines only: ca. summer 1861⁹⁴

A 828 was the only document in this “Master” constellation published, but only partially, in the nineteenth century. Thus, the history of its dating begins with Mabel Todd's apparently deliberate misdating to the mid-1880s of the few lines she chose to publish in *Letters* (1894).⁹⁵ Todd's proposed late date was amended in the twentieth century, first when Bingham issued a correction of her mother's date, noting by way of explanation that the handwriting of the document placed it in the early 1860s, and then by Johnson and Leyda, who both assigned A 828 to 1861.⁹⁶ In *The Master Letters*, Franklin refined the date to “summer 1861”, making no further revisions to the date following his preparation of the variorum.⁹⁷ Editorial agreement about the date of A 828, however, did not extend to agreement about the sequence of documents. Johnson and Leyda conjectured that Dickinson composed A 828 before A 829. In their readings, A 828 marks the apex of the epistolary sequence, followed by A 829, the disordered and fragmentary rough draft. Franklin reverses

93 In his cataloguing notes, Leyda proposed only the more general date of “1861?” for A 828.

94 Miller reprints the verse lines in her *Emily Dickinson's Poems: As She Preserved Them*. She concurs with Franklin's dating.

95 See Todd's *Letters* (1894) and *Letters* (1931).

96 Bingham's presentation of A 828 in *Home* is confusing. While she refers to A 828 as “the second letter” (p. 420), she prints A 828 first in the sequence. In her rendering, the documents unfold in reverse order to that proposed by Franklin.

97 And yet correspondence in the Amherst College Press files from Franklin to John Lancaster, then curator of the Amherst College Archives & Special Collections, suggests that, at least in 1985, Franklin wavered about the season in which the document was composed. In this letter from the Press files he writes, “I'm still mulling about putting a question mark into the date of letter 3, i.e., ‘summer? 1861’.” It appears in Introduction and introduction to Letter 3” (see Franklin's correspondence with Lancaster, 3 November 1985–6 November 1985).

this order, placing A 828 after A 829 and last in the sequence of “Master” documents. While his re-ordering of the documents issued from his analysis of Dickinson’s handwriting and paper types, reversing the positions of A 828 and A 829 has a profound effect on our experience of the documents’ narrative arc.⁹⁸ In addition to encouraging us to read A 828 as the final, exultant document in a mystical sequence, the reversal also opens the possibility that A 829 may have been a very early, abandoned trial for A 828. In this schema, A 826 may function as a verse intermediary between the more epistolary performances of A 829 and A 828.

An abundance of material evidence supports both the dating of A 828 to 1861 and its place as the final “Master” document included in Dickinson’s initial constellation of “Master” documents. That A 828 follows A 826 is strongly suggested by the high incidence of the ligated form of *the*. Indeed, the trending of Dickinson’s *the* to its new, fully ligated form is almost complete: as Franklin remarks in his introduction to *The Master Letters*, in A 828, “the newer form is overwhelmingly dominant (42 linked, 4 unlinked)”.⁹⁹ Other letterforms are evolving too, away from those Ward associated with 1861 and towards those more clearly associated with 1862. While some letterforms and combinations are characteristic of 1861 (e.g., the two forms of *d*, the three forms of *e*, the sweeping cross-strokes of the lowercase *t*), others look forward to the forms they will assume in the subsequent year of 1862 (e.g., the three forms of *y* and the presence of the new form of *P*). Here the aggregate, contradictory behavior of letterforms may illustrate the uncertain dividing line in Dickinson’s manuscripts between 1861 and 1862.

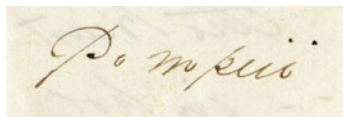


Fig. 12. A new form of *P* associated with the handwriting of 1862 (from A 828, ca. summer–autumn 1861, line 73, detail)

98 In Johnson’s note to L 233 (*Letters*, 1958), he writes “The handwriting is the only clue to the date”; Franklin, who had greater access to Dickinson’s manuscripts than any of her earlier editors, also drew on paper types and stocks—in this case on Dickinson’s patterns of use of specific papers—to confirm the 1861 date.

99 See Franklin’s introduction to *Master Letters*, p. 8.

Here again, paper evidence may be added to handwriting evidence to place A 828 in the latter half of 1861. As noted at the close of the discussion of A 826, in composing A 828, Dickinson drew again on her stock of laid, cream, blue-ruled stationery embossed with a decorative frame containing a queen’s head above the letter L, a paper used most intensively in the spring and summer months of 1861. After the summer, Dickinson’s pattern of use of stationery stock changes, and while she continues to draw from two very similar paper stocks, she does not draw from this particular paper again. The remainder of the poems that compose Fascicles 11 and 12, all seemingly copied late in 1861 or in the early months of 1862, as well as the poems of Fascicle 13, copied in early 1862, are inscribed on stationery still embossed with a queen’s head above the letter L, but wove rather than laid and slightly larger in size. Outside the fascicles, too, in letters and letter-poems copied and sent by Dickinson, these patterns of paper use recur, with scattered letters and letter-poems datable to the spring and summer months of 1861 composed on laid, cream, blue-ruled stationery embossed with a queen’s head and letters and letter-poems datable to late 1861 and early 1862 composed on one of two closely variant stationeries.¹⁰⁰

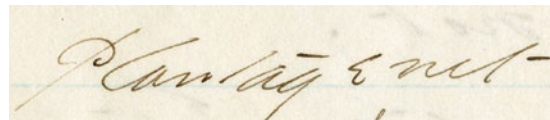


Fig. 13. A 828, ca. summer–autumn 1861, line 47 (detail)



Fig. 14. A 828, emboss

100 The following letters are datable to 1861 and composed on three different paper stocks all embossed with a queen’s head: A 21 (wove paper, blue-ruled lines), A 197 (wove paper), A 304 (wove paper), A 635 (wove paper), A 666 (laid paper, horizontal chain lines, blue-rule lines), A 669 (wove paper, blue-rule lines), A 670 (wove paper), A 674 (wove paper), A 676 (wove paper), A 680 (wove paper), A 681 (wove paper), A 682 (wove paper), A 700 (wove paper), A 796 (laid paper, horizontal chain lines, blue-rule lines), A 826 (laid paper, horizontal chain lines, blue-ruled lines). I am indebted to Mike Kelly, curator of the Amherst College Archives & Special Collections, for his help in examining and confirming Dickinson’s paper types. In 1861, Dickinson drew from several different paper stocks, not just the two variant papers discussed above. In Fascicle 10, copied—we believe—across the breadth of 1861, she uses two forms of laid, cream paper with a blue rule; an inventory of correspondence datable to 1861 indicates that though she very occasionally wrote letters on the same paper found in Fascicles 9, 11, 12, and 13—that is, paper embossed with a queen’s head—she also wrote on other papers, with a strong preference for gilt-edged stationery embossed PARIS.

In the end, a few canceled lines in the text of A 828 lead Franklin to arrive at a summer date for this document: “Could you come to New England – / ~~this summer –~~ ~~could~~ ↑would↓ you come / to Amherst – Would you like / to come – Master?” (121–24).¹⁰¹ He writes, “The fervor of the passage as first written and her cancellation of ‘this summer’—perhaps as being too immediate and importunate—suggest that she was referring to the season at hand.”¹⁰² And so it may be that at the fair height of the year, Dickinson composed A 828 and ended—at least for the time being—the experiment begun in 1858. Yet it is also possible that A 828 was written later, in the late summer or early autumn, closer to the 1861 to 1862 line. Such a reading might seize on the following passage on the verso of the first leaf, where Dickinson imagines that the cooling temperatures of winter are closer to the “Master” than she is:

*If it had been
God's will that I might
breathe where you breathed –
and find the place – myself –
at night – if I ↑can↓ never forget
that I am not with you –
and that sorrow and frost
are nearer than I – if I wish
with a might I cannot
repress – that mine were the
Queen's place – the love of
the – Plantagenet – is my only
apology – (36–48)*

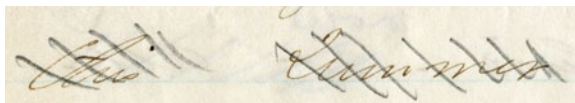


Fig. 15. A 828, ca. summer–autumn 1861, line 122 (detail)

One object of this work has been to restore some of the moments of lost time below the surface of these documents composed and handed over to chance more than a century ago, to make them time-full again. Yet while the work of telling time in Dickinson's manuscripts involves a micro-focus on the visual behavior of handwriting as well as on such bibliographical codes as watermarks and embosses, it also compels us to approach time in Dickinson's writing on a larger scale. In addition to representing the intimate, internal temporality of each document, this edition draws a spatio-temporal “map” of their potential places in Dickinson's production and production habits during ca. 1858 to ca. 1861. Here it is not the exact date or even date range of a given document that is most significant but rather the larger itinerary or arc the “Master” constellation traces in Dickinson's oeuvre and in the world to which that oeuvre was directed. It is through a re-directed focus on this farther trajectory that we gain new insight into the dimensions and coordinates of the discursive field of the “Master” project, its changes over time, and its complex relationship to Dickinson's other writings and evolving aesthetics.

Editing in Space and Time

In this edition, I have used an old technology—the timeline—to suggest something about that trajectory traced by the “Master” documents. In imaginative space, however, the flow of time is never simply linear. Just as the charting of the interior history of Dickinson's compositional process reveals that for her writing was not a straight passage from point to end point, but instead an emergent practice in which the continual testing and processing of all the variables before her often led her in multiple directions, so the contours of Dickinson's different writing experiments may continually shift, sometimes bringing into startling proximity apparently distant and disparate moments. Here the timeline encompassing the “Master” documents is constructed on the model of an accordion foldout to express something of time's resistance to linearity, its topological and stochastic nature that may best be schematized, as Michel Serres

101 Interlineations in Dickinson's writings are indicated with arrows ↑↓ when diplomatic representation is not possible.

102 Franklin, introduction to *Master Letters*, p. 9.

imagines, as a “crumpling, a multiple, foldable diversity”¹⁰³

More so than other documents in Dickinson’s oeuvre, and if only because they have for so long been set outside of it, the “Master” documents seem to require an influx of time. While the first edition to print fragments of a single document (Todd, 1894) wrenched the document out of time by deliberately postdating the work by more than a quarter century, the last edition (Franklin, 1986) imparts to the three epistolary “Master” documents a kind of timelessness by sequestering them from the other documents in Dickinson’s archive. The very topography of the edition that makes it so navigable also affects our perception of the time-space mapped by and within the documents. In the simple act of turning the pages one after the other, we forget about the very real gaps that separate the works we now refer to as the “Master” documents. Yet the moments of composition, recopying, and revision of the five “Master” documents stand within the vastness of what happened in the two or more years that pass between the first extant epistolary text, A 827, and the verse text, A 825, or in the year, perhaps, stretching between A 825 and the disordered draft A 829, or even in the shorter period, possibly the duration of a few months, between the last three extant “Master” documents: the draft (A 829), the verse (A 826), and the most fully realized work of all (A 828).

Whatever the “Master” documents are, Dickinson did not write them as expressions of a secretive communication distant or even cut off from the fertile activity that swirled around her desk in the years ca. 1858 to ca. 1861. Nor did she write them outside of the intense social and political tension and the anticipation of secession and conflict that would at last find an outlet in civil war. While it is beyond the scope of any edition to capture and represent the infinite flow of manifold data from Dickinson’s world or mind ca. spring 1858 to ca. summer 1861, still it may be possible for

an edition to open a wider window onto these years, months, and days and thereby usher into these textual survivors a greater fullness of context.

In the starkest of terms, the distance between the first extant “Master” document of ca. 1858 and the last of ca. 1861 is as wide as the distance Dickinson traveled across the fascicles composed between those years and as absolute and un-crossable as the distance between ante- and post-postbellum America. To register these distances, the edition presents the “Master” documents as careening within two parallel timelines: first, the timeline of Dickinson’s other writings and second, the timeline of history—of national/political crisis and rupture. From our vantage point of the twenty-first century, we may envision a “Master” time point towards which the documents—the trial they embody—are drifting¹⁰⁴; yet it is also essential to recognize that Dickinson’s “Master” experiment breaks off without ending, suggesting perhaps even greater linkages to other ongoing projects in the fascicles and beyond. To conceive of the “Master” project as “whole” or “finished” is to endanger its meaning by enclosing its trial that does not end but rather goes on differently. Like the “Master” whose shattered singularity is his/its identity, the end point of the experiment may be many points.

Although it is beyond the scope of this edition to delve the depths of the artistic and material connections among the “Master” documents, the fascicles, and the post-fascicle productions, the importance of these relationships is undeniable and serves as a challenging summons. Dickinson’s pivotal decision to begin the undertaking of physically constructing the fascicles in 1858 comes shortly after she has composed A 827, the first extant “Master” document; by the time she composes A 828, the final extant document in the primary “Master” constellation, in 1861, the teleological project of the fascicles is already faltering, perhaps in response to the collapse in the order(s) of her world. Between these two moments of 1858 and 1861, changes in Dickinson’s working rhythms and new instabilities in her authorial intentions seen in the fascicles, chief among them the increased presence and pressure of variant readings and the fusion of diverse meters within a single work, often find parallel expression in the “Master” documents. By reading the “Master” project adjacent to the fascicles,

103 See Michel Serres with Bruno Latour, *Conversations on Science, Culture, and Time*, trans. Roxanne Lapidus (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1995), p. 59. Serres’s concept of history in this work as a crumpled handkerchief is especially vivid and relevant to my thinking here: “If you take a handkerchief and spread it out in order to iron it, you can see in it certain fixed distances and proximities. If you sketch a circle in one area, you can mark out nearby points and measure far-off distances. Then take the same handkerchief and crumple it, by putting it in your pocket. Two distant points suddenly are close, even superimposed. If, further, you tear it in certain places, two points that were close can become very distant. This science of nearness and rifts is called topology [. . .]. As we experience time—as much in our inner sense as externally in nature, as much as *le temps* of history as *le temps* of weather—it resembles this crumpled version much more than the flat, overly simplified one” (p. 60).

104 One possible end point, as Jerome McGann suggested to me, is Dickinson’s opening letter to T. W. Higginson, mailed in April 1862.

we may better understand how the seemingly unaccountable otherness of Dickinson's epistolary experiment is woven into the fascicles' evolving heterological work of "choosing not choosing". In fact, the very seams of the fascicles are ultimately rent by a host of variant word choices that are at once fragments of alterity and vestigial voices.

When we consider the general condition of an epistolary project, that of circulation, Dickinson leads us to recalibrate the notion as explicitly interior: a circulation of alternate meanings, the non-identity of poems with themselves. Furthermore, the sudden explosion of letters Dickinson produces in the wake of the fascicles is striking and marks a return to the formal dynamics of the epistolary genre that requires an explanation other than the one so often given: that when Dickinson is exhausted from the work of the fascicles, she turns to the less concentrated (and less mediated) form of the epistle. Such an explanation ignores the qualities, the negative power—sometimes expressed as sparseness and the rejection of the ornamental, sometimes as the oracular or uncanny—of these works that, while once again addressed to specific individuals, seem also directed far beyond them to unidentified addressees and especially to the anonymous future itself. So often in many of these post-fascicle letters, just behind the singular addressee, awaits the alien "It" of the "Master" experiment. The exceptional nature of these letters seems connected to, among other things, the letters' probing of an intimacy threatened by distance. To put this another way, what was presupposed in the pre-fascicle letters—an unchanging locus and a stable speaker—is undone by the "Master" writings, where speaker and addressee are simultaneously singular and multiple, intimate and estranged.

Questions of address in Dickinson's correspondence often lead us to a kind of multiplication of address that can be at once intimate and broadly cast. Such address can be perplexingly expansive also in the dimensions of works such as the "Master" documents, where address is unfulfilled, held in suspension in Dickinson's own private archives until her death. Here the question of circulation becomes one solely of interiority, of the seemingly singular "Master" that immediately expands in its experimentation. While we know that Dickinson will eventually exit both "Master" experiment and the contemporaneous fascicle

experiment, she never stops practicing the crisis of address, the crisis of otherness, manifested in her most daring work.

Similarly, the connection between the "Master" documents and the Civil War calls out for further exploration. Although she could not have anticipated this, in April 1861, history divides Dickinson's writings into those works composed before the war, those composed in its midst, and those composed in its long wake. In the case of the principal "Master" documents, only the first two, A 827 and A 825, are antebellum works; the remaining three, A 829, A 826 and A 828, belong instead to the early months of the Civil War.¹⁰⁵ If our dating is correct, A 829, the roughest and most disordered of the documents in this group, was likely drafted in the spring of 1861, either just before or just after the official declaration of war. By the end of the summer of that year, when what appears to be the last extant "Master" document is written, the Civil War dead and wounded numbered over five thousand and Frazer Stearns, an Amherst boy and friend of Austin Dickinson, and William Clark, Professor of Chemistry at Amherst College, have joined the 21st Massachusetts Volunteer Infantry Regiment.

While we have known for a long time that the years of the Civil War correspond to Dickinson's most intense period of poetic production in the fascicles, recent scholarship on Dickinson's experience of the war suggests that it was at once both nearer to her and also more remote than we have previously understood.¹⁰⁶ In a letter to Thomas Wentworth Higginson written in 1862, Dickinson describes her experience of the war's effects as both local and cosmic, visible and invisible: in war, "Planetary forces",

105 South Carolina seceded from the Union on 20 December 1860, with six more states (Alabama, Mississippi, Louisiana, Texas, Florida, and Georgia) following South Carolina's lead by February 1861 to form the Confederate States of America. Confederate batteries surrounding Charleston Harbor fired upon Fort Sumter on Friday, 12 April 1861. The fort was surrendered on 13 April and evacuated the following day. The telegraph guaranteed quick dissemination of the news to the North.

106 Cristanne Miller's *Reading in Time: Emily Dickinson in the Nineteenth Century* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2012) is an especially thoughtful work; see chapter 6, "Reading and Writing the Civil War", pp. 147–75. Here it seems necessary to add that it would be irresponsible to imagine that the "Master" experiment was an explicitly social one. The forms of exclusion faced by the speaker-writer were never equivalent (and perhaps not even related) to the social structures of exclusion faced by an enslaved population, and the word *Master* never signified the locus of destructive, eradicating power it embodied for those in bondage.

though not “annulled”, suffer “an Exchange of Territory, or World” while human “Systems” and notions of “Progress” vaporize before her eyes.¹⁰⁷ It may be that the “convulsion”—Whitman’s expressive word—of the war is registered in the seemingly sudden breakdown of the formal elements of the third document of the constellation, A 829 (*Oh ‘ did I offend it*), or in the sudden substitution of the increasingly inhuman “It” for “Master” as that document’s addressee. In any case, it seems that we must pursue such tentative connections, if they exist, through form, not content, in the disruption of the ontological grounding of language and frames of reference effected by the war. Thus while the timeline of Dickinson’s writings is crowded with data, the timeline of the Civil War is represented as a more spectral horizon for Dickinson’s writings.

Between these two timelines, the first represented in some density, the second only very sparsely, is a space for the imagination of other and alternative lines (and narratives) that may capture something of the complex, heterogeneous, and sometimes random reality in which Dickinson lived and wrote from profoundly different perspectives and in profoundly different scales—for example, lines tracing her reading and annotating, lines tracing the local unfolding of events in Amherst, lines tracing a deep history of natural events and human disasters in the Connecticut River Valley, lines tracing events in the stars and constellations above New England. Each vibrant line—and, especially, the lines together—may form “event streams” that might better permit us to see the confluence of actions and evidence.

As our turn into the spatial humanities has shown us, time-boundedness is also always place-boundedness. In addition to returning the “Master” documents to the flow—or folds—of time, this edition seeks to re-world them by imagining them again as they may have once lain on the ever-changing surface of Dickinson’s desk while also seeing the desk itself as in dynamic relation to the world beyond Dickinson’s west-facing bedroom windows. In the timeline tracing Dickinson’s literary productions, a first distinction is made between those writings we know Dickinson sent out beyond the site of her writing and

those that we believe remained at or near her desk; a second distinction marks the different textual conditions of the documents that remained on Dickinson’s desk—whether fascicled or loose.

For even in the case of this seemingly ineluctably place-bound writer, an understanding of Dickinson’s literary production requires us to focus not only on the fixed coordinates of her desk but also on the many sites to which her writings traveled and in which they were read. How might we better read Dickinson’s decision to withhold the “Master” documents from circulation while other writings from the period of 1858 to 1861, both letters and poems, sped outward along trajectories leading to the Evergreens, the “house next door”; to points throughout Massachusetts: Northampton, Springfield, Worcester, and Cambridge; and still farther out, to Chicago and Grand Rapids? What were the meanings of “near” and “far” to Dickinson? Are documents left in a desk drawer for twenty years closer to or further from the writer than the letter or poem she composes and sends away in the morning’s post? And what of our own sense of closeness to or distance from them? Although the “Master” documents remained “out of circulation” in Dickinson’s lifetime, they nonetheless traveled across a century and a half to us, and they will keep moving on into a future beyond us. What flows of power have they traveled in? What itineraries are they (still) tracing?¹⁰⁸

In the end, the timelines here—marked by errors of continuity arising out of our uncertain and always incomplete dating of Dickinson’s writings and, more fundamentally, by their inability to fully convey the incessant folding and refolding and creasing of time (in inner experience in the mind, in writing, in history)—fall short of my aim. Yet they may have some more immediate and salutary uses. By encouraging us to think about Dickinson’s writings both synchronically and diachronically, they may begin to illuminate something of the fullness of time as it is felt through writing’s unfolding within and across it, and they may enlarge our awareness of new patterns in poetics and historiography. While they have not entirely escaped their linear form, they seek “to represent the world as extremely

107 Johnson, *Letters* (1958), L 280, ca. February 1863.

108 The importance of reading Dickinson in time is clearly reflected in Miller’s *Emily Dickinson’s Poems: As She Preserved Them*.

complex, with endless connections among events and actors and multiple causes for effects that exert continuing influence on the world of thought and behavior”; they are an invitation to engage in a more immersive, emplaced experience of Dickinson’s writings.¹⁰⁹

Principles of Transcription

Transcription is never simply the transfer of Dickinson’s handwritten productions into printed form. First, Dickinson’s hand is unlike any other. Second, such an approach would imply that transcription is mechanical when it is invariably a complex response to the conditions of a particular manuscript or set of manuscripts. In the case of Dickinson’s “Master” documents, the original manuscripts are unique, beautiful, and varied. Of the five documents included in the present constellation, two (A 827, A 828) are likely epistolary missives, two (A 825, A 826) are verses, and one (A 829) is a draft of uncertain genre. They were composed in three different years—ca. 1858, ca. 1860, and ca. 1861—each associated with changes in particular letterforms, and they were simultaneously abandoned and saved in at least three different states: one is a rough draft, two are likely intermediate copies, one is a fair copy with light revisions, and the last is a fair copy revised in ink and pencil in two distinct moments. All five are private documents—though even this category is a nuanced one, since there are different levels of privacy even among them—and none was ever bound or circulated.

Most fundamentally, this edition approaches each work—that is to say, each text inscribed on a material document—as invested with a singular identity and history that does not end in the nineteenth century but is conveyed into our own time and will likely continue on. For while the texts have not changed since Dickinson inscribed and revised them over 150 years ago, the manuscripts have continued their passage through time, the effects of which can sometimes be seen in the damage to their leaves by light, the altered pigment in their ink, and certainly the damage of their handling after Dickinson’s death. In this edition, the first form of transcription is photographic, their current condition. These digitally reproduced surrogates of Dickinson’s original manuscripts convey the vulnerability,

contingency, remoteness and yet perpetual, still present potential and vitality of these time-bound artifacts.¹¹⁰

The importance of representing as accurately as possible the material integrity of the “Master” documents has governed the very size and shape of the present edition, an 11" × 11" square. In the case of A 825 and A 826, where the verse texts are inscribed on a single side of a single leaf (A 826) or part leaf (A 825), with unrelated writing in Dickinson’s hand on the other side of the leaf or part leaf, *en face* presentation of facsimiles and typographic transcriptions that maintained the documents’ material integrity could have been accommodated in a standard 7" × 9" edition. However, in the case of the three more epistolary texts, all of which, like Dickinson’s fascicles, are composed of one or more bifolia sheets, a facing-page display of a single sheet’s partial text and partial documentary materiality would artificially divide the bifolium into four disjunct pages (the faces of two leaves), thus erasing significant visual and material relationships, such as between conjunct leaves 1v and 2r. The larger format allows for the unbroken presentation of conjunct leaves without sacrificing the guidance offered by parallel transcriptions. Just as importantly, the format enables the reader to interact with the documents in ways similar to those in which Dickinson herself—as writer and especially as reader—may have done.

The second form of transcription is the print rendering of Dickinson’s handwritten documents. The texts of the “Master” documents included here were accurately established by Ralph W. Franklin in his 1986 edition of *The Master Letters* and his 1998 variorum of the poems, and with the exception of a few differing interpretations of punctuation marks, this edition offers no significant textual emendations. Yet the typographic transcriptions included here offer more than a careful rendering, leaf by leaf, of the texts carried by the documents. Like my previous work transcribing Dickinson’s manuscripts—for example, the late prose and verse fragments, the “envelope writings”, etc.—this edition assumes that Dickinson’s handwriting and punctuation are inherently expressive,

110 The camera used to photograph the core manuscripts in this edition was a Phase One IQ3 100 megapixel camera back attached to a Digital Transitions R-Cam; the images were captured and processed using Capture One Pro. The imaging guidelines used here were those established by the Library of Congress: all objects were captured at 600ppi to ensure maximum detail and were color managed to ensure true color fidelity.

109 See Bodenhamer, Corrigan, and Harris, eds., *Deep Maps*, p. 2.

that the visual force and scale of particular letters impact the affect of the manuscripts, that physical line breaks may be meaningfully in play with metrical ones, that authorial variants often exceed one-to-one relationships with the words or passages with which they are linked, and that acts of cancellation are differently inflected. Although no print transcription can convey all of these (and the many other) attributes of Dickinson's handwritten texts, an awareness of these attributes may further a more thoughtful poetics of transcription while also guiding the larger presentation of the documents.

Even as the timeline begins to establish the external temporality of the five documents included here by contextualizing and connecting each to the larger "Master" experiment as well as to other texts produced in the 1858 to 1861 period, my method of transcription seeks to discover the internal temporality of the text's unfolding. Here it is a matter of trying to follow, as closely as we can, the sequence of Dickinson's thoughts as she inscribed them on paper. By re-dynamizing as far as possible these writing traces, we may bear clearer witness to those moments when she turned back or rushed forward, when one thought overtook or crowded out another, or when several thoughts in the shapes of authorial variants hung seemingly between rejection and preferred reading. And, when the spatial organization of her words on the folded pages seems to defy temporal determination, we learn new, subtler ways to follow her, searching out, for instance, the varying thicknesses of pencil strokes used to strike through one reading and underscore another.

To this end, I have transcribed line by line, reporting as precisely as possible the sequence in which she inscribed the words of the text as well as the spatio-temporal relations between the principal text and all of the authorial interventions, including insertions, variants, underscores, over-writing, and cancellations, graphically in order to avoid the use of intrusive—that is, mediating—editorial symbols.

My goal in this edition, moreover, has been to experiment with typographic facsimiles, as opposed to strictly diplomatic transcriptions. Using InDesign CC 13.0.1, I initially created transcriptions whose scale, contours, and folding marks, as well as interstitial spacing and even

certain letterforms, mirrored that of the manuscripts.¹¹¹ It was clear, however, that a print replica of a handwritten production is a mirage, an optical illusion, a displaced image of a distant object. Ultimately, I decided to compose typographic facsimiles of the "Master" documents that, as María Celeste Martín writes of her own astonishing transcriptions of Jorge Luis Borges's manuscripts, seek both to "maintain a spatial relationship to the original document" and to respect "the 'spirit' of the handwriting" by following Dickinson where she writes/draws outside the necessarily regularizing typographic grid.¹¹² Unlike all previous printed transcriptions of Dickinson's manuscripts, these are rendered in italic to suggest the prevailing cursive mode of the late 1850s and early 1860s. Above all, the typographic facsimiles hope to convey Dickinson's hand as singular, erring, moving. . . .¹¹³

While there are many variations in Dickinson's handwriting, two fundamental hands, referred to as Hand A and Hand B, are discernible in the "Master" documents constellated here.¹¹⁴ Hand A, whether in ink or pencil, is a fine, elegant hand in which the letters feel "more drawn than written";¹¹⁵ a quality especially pronounced in the long, left-sweeping descenders of certain letters such as *y*, in the restrained but evident embellishment of some letterforms such as *V* and *S/s*, and in the varying treatment of the crossbars of *T/t*, many of which are detached from their stems and stretch out across the word. The punctuation in this hand is quite legible: the trademark "dash", though varying slightly in length and angle, remains

111 In the first transcriptions I experimented with, I also attempted to capture ligation patterns in Dickinson's script in the hope of showing how these patterns changed over time. The impossibility of finding a font that could represent ligation led me to abandon this practice.

112 See, especially, María Celeste Martín's "Repetir en un idioma ajeno, un libro preexistente", in Jorge Luis Borges, *Cuentos*, ed. Daniel Balderston and María Celeste Martín (Pittsburgh, PA: Borges Center, University of Pittsburgh, 2020), pp. 95–106. Although these transcriptions do not succeed nearly as well as Martín's, her thoughtful and compelling typographic facsimiles of Borges's manuscripts as well as her commentary on her work were important influences for this edition.

113 The decision to remove the contours of the leaves on which Dickinson wrote was among the more vexed decisions in this process; in the end, though, I decided to emphasize the way Dickinson often creates the edges of the page through her interstitial spacing. The loss of folding marks in the transcriptions, given their potential indication of levels of privacy, is a more considered limitation of this presentation.

114 It is important not to automatically conflate the state of a MS with the hand or hands found in it.

115 This is Martín's description of one of Borges's hands; see her "Repetir en un idioma ajeno".

readily distinguishable from the comma. Hand A is fluent but also reflective—there are even breathing spaces between letters and words that impart a feeling of composure to the pages: it is likely a “copying” hand rather than a “drafting” hand. It is the hand of A 826, A 827, and A 828. The font representing this hand, Caslon Italic, was selected for its legibility and organic, flowing structure—a structure reminiscent of handwriting with a pen.

Hand B is inflected very differently. While there may be examples of this hand in ink, there are many more in pencil. Here the handwriting is devoid of ornamentation; letters and words are not always proportional with respect to one another, with some letters either exaggerated (e.g., *c*) or awkwardly foreshortened (e.g., *y*, *g*). And while the writing retains some of the slant found in Hand A, not all letters or words appear angled in the same direction, sometimes because of their uneven placement along the baseline of the rule, other times because of their disjointed inscription. The leaves covered in this writing feel cramped, the result, in part, of a loss of height in many of the letters and also of the loss of definition—even blurring—of letters. The uneven gaps between words and sometimes between letters of a single word (e.g., *it*, *oh*) only adds to this feeling of struggle. In this hand, punctuation marks other than dashes or commas appear only rarely, and there is no longer the possibility of distinguishing meaningfully between dashes and commas since a range of similar marks appear in many different lengths and especially angles. In my transcriptions of Hand B, I have tried to visually indicate the range of the angled marks that may represent dashes, commas, breath marks, or another form of temporal or spatial interruption both to begin an inventory of these marks and to disrupt the surfaces of the transcriptions in ways suggestive of the disruption felt in the original manuscripts. Hand B, concentrated, immediate, sometimes erratic, is likely a drafting hand, a hand of trial and experimentation. It is the hand we see in A 825 and A 829. The font representing this hand, *Leitura*, was chosen for its upright, slightly chiseled quality and for its ability to convey the changing rhythms of the writing hand.¹¹⁶

116 In the fonts used for both hands, slight adjustments to the weights have been made to more closely capture traits of the handwriting.

Dickinson’s use of ink, lead, or a combination of ink and lead in the inscription and revision of her work is indicated by color in the transcriptions: ink is represented in brown, lead in 80 percent black. The rare marks made by Millicent Todd Bingham, the only editor to mark the manuscripts, are represented in dark blue.¹¹⁷ Finally, since I refer in both the headnotes in the edition at the heart of this work and throughout the commentary to line numbers in Dickinson’s “Master” documents, I have included line references in the transcriptions. The aim here is ease of reference for the reader. These numbers, appearing at intervals to the left of the transcription text, mark both the line number of Dickinson’s text in its continuous unfolding and the line number of text on a given leaf.

In the end, of course, the “Master” documents are not transparent, and all transcriptions of them, even typographic facsimiles, as I’ve elsewhere noted, are the equivalent of “thin maps”, flat, two-dimensional representations of three-dimensional documents and records of a living, interior process of thought.¹¹⁸ And yet despite—or perhaps because of—these limitations, transcriptions of Dickinson’s manuscripts still have great interpretive value. The act of transcription requires us to attend closely to the manuscript before us, to acknowledge that it is replete with signs and marks not all of which we can presume to understand, even when they seem to summon us. Similarly, the reader who thoughtfully compares the manuscript with the transcription will not only take note of their differences from each other but also see further—or otherwise—than the transcriber, adding to the list of cruxes attached to the manuscript. Perhaps most important of all, in their encounter with Dickinson’s manuscripts, transcriber and reader will share the experience of our distance—defamiliarization—from the mind and hand that composed them and let go once and for all the desire to appropriate them—and, by extension, Dickinson herself. What Thomas Greene wrote so compellingly about the manuscripts of George Herbert may also be said of Dickinson’s: “The first, simple and difficult act of reading

117 The only other non-authorial marks on the manuscripts are the library catalogue numbers added by Jay Leyda during the cataloguing process.

118 See my “Textual Preface: Transcriptions as ‘Thin Maps’” in Michael Kelly, Marta Werner, Carolyn Vega, Susan Howe, and Richard Wilbur, *The Networked Recluse: The Connected World of Emily Dickinson* (Amherst, MA: Amherst College Press, 2017), pp. 139–46.

is to see that remote text as truly remote. [. . .] We can begin to read only after granting the text the seclusion and particularity of its unique inflection”.¹¹⁹

In *The Allure of the Archives*, Arlette Farge writes, “The archival document is a tear in the fabric of time, an unplanned glimpse into an unexpected event”.¹²⁰ That we should have received these documents at all, after such a long delay and in circumstances that the writer herself could never have foreseen, is an enigma. The “Master” documents tear the veil away from Dickinson’s writing life ca. 1858 to ca. 1861 even as they maintain their own incommensurable distance from us. They must have primary authority for any scholarly study of Dickinson’s work. Just as clearly, the meaning of these documents cannot be disclosed simply by tracing the history of their composition, transmission, and publication or even by the close analysis of their orthography, punctuation, word choices, and other textual features. Here facsimiles, transcriptions, and annotations do not ever solve the mystery of “original” or “final” intentions of these documents that history or chance has handed down to us. Yet a search fueled by philological eros may lead us ever more deeply into an encounter with the “Master” documents and the larger experiment they represent.

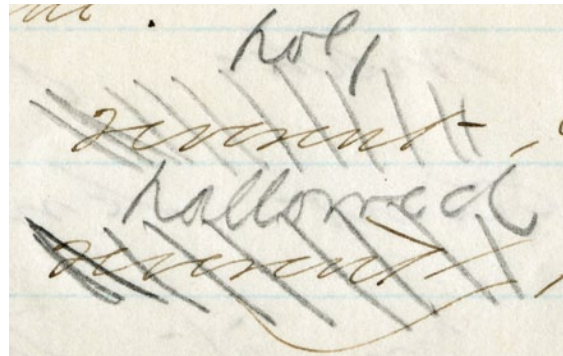


Fig. 16. A 828, ca. summer–autumn 1861, lines 64–65 (details)

119 Thomas M. Greene, *The Vulnerable Text: Essays on Renaissance Literature* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986), pp. 157–58. To Greene’s valuable remarks on the nature of transcription, we might add those of Michel de Certeau, who distinguishes between two kinds of transcribers: one—the copyist—who approaches the work “as a process of assimilation that eliminated differences, to make way for the sacrament of the copy” and another—the translator—who approaches the work as “an operator of differentiation” in order to engage in “the production of otherness”; see Michel de Certeau, *The Mystic Fable*, vol. 1, *The Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries*, trans. Michael B. Smith (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), p. 119. Here I have sought to follow the principles—ethics—of the translator rather than the devotion of the copyist.

120 Arlette Farge, *The Allure of the Archives*, trans. Thomas Scott–Railton (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2013), p. 6.

Manuscript Witnesses & Transcriptions in Time

The construction of the Dickinson timeline included here requires some immediate explanations of its methods and how it can both question and reveal.¹²¹

In addition to providing depth—thickness—to the time of Dickinson's writing ca. spring 1858 to ca. summer 1861, the timeline aims to foreground the varying levels of certainty as well as the *essential uncertainty* at the heart of dating Dickinson's manuscripts and thereby unsettle the critical over-interpretations of evidence that characterize the artful reconstruction of Dickinson's work and life. Taking as my point of departure the dates of Dickinson's writings provided in Johnson's *Letters* (1958) and Franklin's *Poems* (1998), I have sought to distinguish more clearly among works that can be dated with a high degree of certainty, those that are datable with a reasonable degree

of certainty, and those whose dating remains conjectural.¹²²

- Only writings with extant material witnesses *and* verifiable corroborating internal evidence of their compositional date are considered datable with a high degree of certainty.
- Writings associated with extant material witnesses are considered datable with a reasonable degree of certainty, though necessarily with a greater margin of error. The “Master” documents fall into this category.
- The dating of all writings for which no material witnesses survive and in which the internal evidence is insufficient to confirm a clear date is considered conjectural.

Most often, the dates Johnson and Franklin assigned to Dickinson's writings are to months or seasons, sometimes to periods within a year (e.g., first half of 1860, the second half of 1860), and occasionally only generally to a calendar year. On the timeline, writings dated only to a given year

121 Here the dating of Dickinson's writings generally follows that proposed in Franklin's *Poems* (1998) and Johnson's *Letters* (1958). In the course of preparing his *Poems*, Franklin revised the dates of a number of Dickinson's letters, and these revised dates are incorporated here. In *My Wars Are Laid Away in Books: The Life of Emily Dickinson* (2001), Alfred Habegger proposed several additional key revisions to the dating of Dickinson's letters to Samuel and Mary Bowles, and his revisions are also noted here. Ellen Louise Hart and Martha Nell Smith approach the challenge of dating Dickinson's writings to Susan Dickinson more circumspectly in their edition *Open Me Carefully* (1998), often assigning date ranges, rather than single dates, to these writings; these “areas of time” are included in the notes to the present timeline. Given their long years of intimacy with these documents, their reservations about identifying precise dates must be taken seriously. Crisanne Miller's *Emily Dickinson's Poems: As She Preserved Them* (2016) proved a valuable resource for potential fascicle copying dates. Finally, the forthcoming edition of letters edited by Crisanne Miller and Domhnall Mitchell will almost certainly offer further important revisions to the dating of Dickinson's writings.

122 The criteria for datability proposed by H. Wayne Storey and Isabella Magni in their construction of a digital timeline for Petrarch's *Fragmenta* have been formative in my thinking about the timeline offered here. Magni's observation, moreover, that “between the categories of ‘the dated’ [...] and ‘the conjectured’ [...] the more difficult area of ‘the datable’ raises methodological questions as to what might constitute this potentially wide-ranging definition” is as true of the dating of Dickinson's writings as of Petrarch's; see “The Timeline” in “Instructions” at <http://dcl.slis.indiana.edu/petrarchive/>. See also Isabella Magni, “The *Fragmenta's* Timeline: Models for Reconstructing and Interpreting the Text”, in “Authority and Materiality in the Italian Songbook: From the Medieval Lyric to the Early-Modern Madrigal”, ed. Olivia Holmes and Paul Schleuse, special issue, *Mediaevalia* 39 (2018): 319–43.

appear in a footnote at the beginning of the line for that year; works dated to “early in the year” and the “first half of the year” appear in the winter of the designated year, though they may belong in the following spring; works dated the “second half of the year” are placed in summer of the designated year, though they may belong to later months in the autumn or early winter; and works dated to “late in the year” appear in the autumn/early winter of the designated year.

The dates Johnson and Franklin assigned to Dickinson’s manuscripts often identify the date of a work’s transcription, rather than the date of its drafting. The almost complete absence of working drafts for the poems copied and generally bound between ca. 1858 and ca. 1861, moreover, makes it especially difficult to mark with certainty the composition dates of work falling in this period. How temporally near, or far, working and fair copies of these writings stand to each other cannot be known and is not represented on the timeline. It is likely that the poems Dickinson transcribed and bound in the earliest fascicles belong to a wide range of years before 1858, including the anomaly year of 1857, to which no extant documents have been assigned. By 1859 or 1860, at which point we may more safely assume that Dickinson’s storehouse of early poems had been largely cleared, drafts and fair copies may stand in closer proximity.

At least one critical set of dates is missing from this timeline of Dickinson’s writings ca. spring 1858 to ca. summer 1861: the dates indicating the moment of Dickinson’s discarding of particular working drafts, or groups of drafts, will probably forever remain unknown. How long did the working drafts of a given poem typically remain among Dickinson’s papers? What conditions precipitated their destruction? Although the timeline cannot answer these questions, it may raise them in a more restricted and documentable context.

Finally, along the timeline, Dickinson’s writings are divided into two broad groups: “Writings in prose and/or verse sent out to known and unknown correspondents” and “Writings in prose and/or verse retained in Dickinson’s private archive”. By classifying surviving documents in this way, I seek to call attention to the distinction between documents definitely circulated by Dickinson and those works or versions of works apparently withheld from

circulation.¹²³ Writings sent to correspondents outside the Homestead are arranged alphabetically by recipient; writings stored in Dickinson’s private archive are arranged in the following order: single works in prose and/or verse composed on leaves never bound into larger gatherings are listed first, followed by verse works copied on sheets later bound into fascicles. Notes on possible binding dates for fascicles are also given. These orderings of documents along the timeline are editorial and do not reflect the unrecoverable authorial order of Dickinson’s archive.

Timeline Key

- Verified timeframe
- Probable timeframe
- Conjectural timeframe

Blue text

Writings in prose and/or verse sent out to known and unknown correspondents

Red text

Writings in prose and/or verse retained in Dickinson’s private archive

Green text

Historic national events

¹²³ While it is possible, even likely, that some manuscripts circulated by Dickinson did not survive, thus skewing the ratio of manuscripts circulated and manuscripts withheld from circulation, I nonetheless believe that these classifications are meaningful. The textual evidence we have both acknowledges the extent of Dickinson’s deeply networked universe and her simultaneous cultivation of private (unshared) writing space.

Dear Master / I am ill – (A 827)

Date: Composed, or possibly copied from an earlier (initial or intermediate) draft (not extant), and probably revised on the same occasion, in ink, ca. spring 1858.

Material: One sheet, folded vertically into two leaves (each leaf = 187 × 123 mm) of wove, cream, blue-ruled stationery, later hand-folded horizontally into quarters.

Provenance: Discovered among Dickinson's papers after her death.

Initial custody: Unsent in Dickinson's lifetime; no evidence of circulation of a copy of or similar to this document has been found.

Secondary custody: MS likely passed from Lavinia Norcross Dickinson to Mabel Loomis Todd, ca. 1891; from Todd to Millicent Todd Bingham, ca. 1932; and from Bingham to Amherst College, 1956, where it was catalogued by Jay Leyda as A 827.

Current custody: Amherst College Archives & Special Collections.

Scholarly publication history: MTB 1955, pp. 431–32; THJ 1958, L 187; YH 1960, l. 352–53; RWF 1986, pp. 11–19, in facsimile with printed transcript.

Summary of authorial interventions in the text:

Leaf 1, verso, line 7: ED added the second “e” (closed form) in ink to “Indeed”.

Leaf 2, recto, lines 17–18: After first writing, “I cannot talk any more / tonight” ED struck through “talk” and “more” in favor of the variants “stay” and “longer”—both written above the line and slightly to the right of the words they replace. At this time, ED seems also to have proposed “now” as a possible variant for “tonight” but she rejected this alternate, canceling “now” and proposing that the lines read “I cannot stay any longer / tonight”.

Authorial changes to the document: Leaf 2, recto, header: ED spilled a drop of ink.

Dear Master / I am ill - (A 827)

Leaf 1, recto

827

Dear Master I am ill.
 but grieving more
 that you are ill.
 make my stronger hand
 work long eno' to tell
 you. I thought perhaps
 you were in Heaven,
 and when you spoke
 again, it seemed
 quite sweet, and
 wonderful, and surprised
 me so. I wish that
 you were well.
 I would that all I

1 Dear Master
 I am ill -
 but grieving more
 that you are ill, I
 5 make my stronger hand
 work long eno' to tell
 you - I thought perhaps
 you were in Heaven,
 and when you spoke
 10 again, it seemed
 quite sweet, and
 wonderful, and surprised
 me so - I wish that
 you were well.
 15 I would that all I

love, should be what no
 more. The birds are
 of my love. The birds
 are dear, and "Spring"
 they say, who is the
 going of the sun.
 I know it is God's house,
 and this are gates
 of Heaven, and so
 and so, the angels
 go, with their sweet
 positions. I wish that
 I were great like Mr.
 Nicholas Angelo, and
 could paint for you.
 You ask me what
 my flowers said.
 They were
 disobedient. I gave
 them messages.

827a

They said what the
 lips in the West say,
 when the sun goes
 down, and so says
 the dawn.
 Listen again, Master.
 I did not tell you that
 they had seen the
 Sabbath. No.
 Even Sabbath on the
 day, makes me come
 the Sabbath, all are
 men on shore, and
 whether the birds will
 take as true as the
 children say. So long
 I cannot take any more
 things, for this pain
 kills me.
 How strong when death
 is recollect, and ever
 mine, to love. This ever

Dear Master / I am ill – (A 827)

Leaf 1, verso

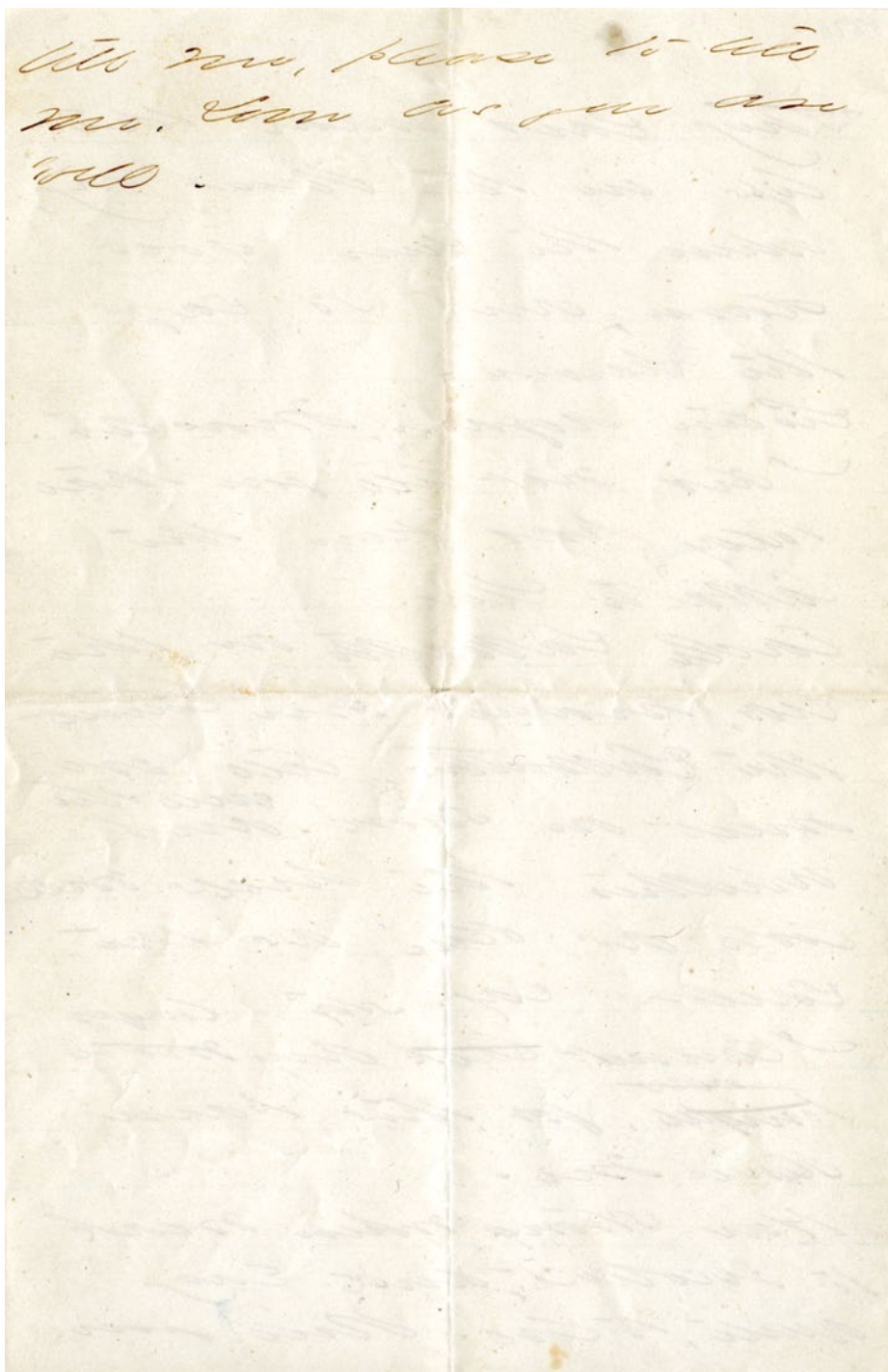
Leaf 2, recto

*love, should be weak no
 more. The Violets are
 by my side · the Robin
 very near – and "Spring" –*
 20 [5] *they say, Who is she –
 going by the door –
 Indeed it is God's house –
 and these are gates
 of Heaven, and to*
 25 [10] *and fro, the angels
 go, with their sweet
 postillions – I wish that
 I were great, like Mr –
 Michael Angelo, and*
 30 [15] *could paint for you.
 You ask me what
 my flowers said –
 then they were
 disobedient – I gave*
 35 [20] *them messages –*

*They said what the
 lips in the West, say,
 when the sun goes
 down, and so says*
 40 [5] *the Dawn –
 Listen again, Master.
 I did not tell you that
 today had been the
 Sabbath Day.*
 45 [10] *Each Sabbath on the
 sea, makes me count
 the Sabbaths, till we
 meet on shore – and ^{will the}
 whether the hills will*
 50 [15] *look as blue as the
 sailors say –
 I cannot ^{stay} ~~talk~~ ^{longer} any ~~more~~
~~now~~ tonight, for this pain
 denies me –*
 55 [20] *How strong when weak
 to recollect, and easy
 quite, to love. Will you*

Dear Master / I am ill - (A 827)

Leaf 2, verso



*tell me, please to tell
me, soon as you are*

60 [3] *well -*

THE WRITING LINE

1858

*Towards A 827*¹²⁴

Spring 1858

Writings Circulated

- None currently identified.

Writings Retained

- *Dear Master / I am ill* – (Dickinson drafts the first extant “Master” document; MS A 827/L 187), ca. spring 1858.

Between A 827 & A 825

Summer 1858

Writings Circulated

- ED copies and sends “Morns like these – we parted.” (Fr 18B) to Susan Dickinson, ca. summer.
- ED copies and sends “Frequently the woods are pink –” (Fr 24A) to Susan Dickinson, ca. summer.¹²⁵
- ED writes to Susan Dickinson (L 198); the letter includes “Sleep is supposed to be” (Fr 35A), ca. summer.
- ED writes Mary Emerson Haven, early summer, “Dear Mrs Haven – / Have you – or has Mr Haven – in his Library...” (L 191).
- ED writes Mary Emerson Haven, late August, “Good night, dear Mrs Haven!” (L 192).
- ED writes Elizabeth Holland, early August?, “Don’t tell, dear Mrs Holland, but wicked as I am...” (L 185).
- ED copies and sends “Morns like these – we parted” (Fr 18[A]¹²⁶) to Louise and Frances Norcross, ca. summer.

124 At times, additional, often variant copies of poems appearing in the years covered by the present timeline may be found either before the line’s beginning or after its end. They are not noted here; see R. W. Franklin’s *Poems* (1998) to follow the histories of poems.

125 Dated by Hart and Smith to the “late 1850s”; see *OMC*, p. 78.

126 Brackets indicate that the original manuscript has been lost or destroyed.

- ED writes Joseph A. Sweetser, early summer, “Much has occurred, dear Uncle...” (L 190).
- ED copies “Nobody knows this little rose;” (Fr 11[A]) and sends it to an unknown recipient; the text of this (lost) copy is published on 2 August in the *Springfield Daily Republican*.

Writings Retained

- ED drafts “If those I loved were lost;” (Fr 20A), ca. summer; this copy remained unbound.
- After copying “The feet of people walking home” (Fr 16A), ca. summer, into Fascicle 1 (F1), ED made two additional variant copies later in the summer, both of which she retains. The first one (Fr 16B) was eventually homed in F14, bound four years later; the second one (Fr 16C), torn roughly along the spine, remained among Dickinson’s unbound papers.
- ED copies the following poems onto one sheet, ca. summer: “Adrift! A little boat adrift!” (Fr 6A); “Summer for thee, grant I may be” (Fr 7A); “When Roses cease to bloom, Sir;” (Fr 8A); “Oh if remembering were forgetting –” (Fr 9A); “On this wondrous sea – sailing silently –” (Fr 3B); “Garlands for Queens, may be –” (Fr 10A); “Nobody knows this little Rose –” (Fr 11B). [This sheet will become the fourth and final sheet of F1.]
- ED copies the following poems onto one sheet, ca. summer: “I had a guinea golden –” (Fr 12A); “There is a morn by men unseen –” (Fr 13A); “As if I asked a common alms –” (Fr 14A); “She slept beneath a tree –” (Fr 15A). [This sheet will become the second sheet of F1.]
- ED copies the following poems onto one sheet, ca. summer: “The feet of people walking home” (Fr 16A); “It’s all I have to bring today –” (Fr 17A); “Morns like these – we parted –” (Fr 18C); “So has a Daisy vanished” (Fr 19A); “If those I loved were lost” (Fr 20B). [This sheet will become the third sheet of F1.]
- ED copies the following poems onto one sheet, ca. late summer: “The Gentian weaves her fringes –” (Fr 21A); “A brief, but patient illness –” (Fr 22A); “In the name of the Bee –” (Fr 23A); “Frequently

the woods are pink –” (Fr 24B); “A sepal – petal – and a thorn” (Fr 25A); “Distrustful of the Gentian –” (Fr 26A); “Flees so the phantom meadow” (Fr 27A); “We lose – because we win –” (Fr 28A); “All these my banners be.” (Fr 29A); “To lose – if One can find again –” (Fr 30A); “To him who keeps an Orchis’ heart –” (Fr 31A). [This sheet will become the first sheet of F1.]

- ED may have bound the sheets of F1 in late summer.

Autumn 1858

Writings Circulated

- ED writes Susan Dickinson, 26 September, “I hav’n’t any paper, dear, ...” (L 194).¹²⁷
- ED copies and sends “The morns are meeker than they were –” (Fr 32A) to Susan Dickinson, ca. autumn.
- ED copies and sends “I never told the buried gold” (Fr 38A) to Susan Dickinson, ca. autumn.
- ED copies and sends “One Sister have I in our house –” (L 197; Fr 5A) to Susan Dickinson, perhaps as a birthday greeting on 19 December.
- ED copies and sends “There is a word” (Fr 42A) to Susan Dickinson, ca. late in the year.
- ED copies and sends “Thro’ lane it lay – thro’ bramble –” (Fr 43A) to Susan Dickinson, ca. late in the year.
- ED copies and sends “The guest is gold and crimson –” (Fr 44A) to Susan Dickinson, ca. late in the year.
- ED writes Josiah and Elizabeth Holland, about 6 November, “Dear Hollands, / Good-night! I can’t stay any longer...” (L 195).

127 Hart and Smith agree with this date; see *OMC*, pp. 74–75. They date the remainder of the writings sent to Susan Dickinson listed here, with the exception of “The guest is gold and crimson –”, not included in their edition, to the “late 1850s”; see *OMC*, pp. 82, 81, 76, 79, 80, respectively.

1859

Spring 1859

Writings Circulated

- ED writes Samuel Bowles, April, "Friend, / Sir, / I did not see you...."¹³¹ (L 205).
- ED copies and sends "Delayed till she had ceased to know –" (Fr 67A) to Susan Dickinson, ca. spring.
- ED copies and sends "We should not mind so small a flower –" (Fr 82A) to Susan Gilbert Dickinson, ca. spring.
- ED copies and sends "Baffled for just a day or two –" (Fr 66A) to Elizabeth Holland, with a rosebud attached, ca. spring.
- ED writes Louise Norcross, late April, "Dear Loo, / You did not acknowledge..." (L 206).

Writings Retained

- ED copies the following poems onto a sheet, ca. spring: "My Wheel is in the dark!" (Fr 61B); "There's something quieter than sleep" (Fr 62A); "I keep my pledge." (Fr 63A); "Heart! We will forget him!" (Fr 64A); "Once more, my now bewildered Dove" (Fr 65A); "Baffled for just a day or two –" (Fr 66B). [This sheet will become the fourth and final sheet of F2.]
- ED copies the following poems onto a sheet, ca. spring: "Delayed till she had ceased to know –" (Fr 67B); "Some things that fly there be –" (Fr 68A); "Within my reach!" (Fr 69A); "So bashful when I spied her!" (Fr 70A); "My friend must be a Bird –" (Fr 71A); "Went up a year this evening!" (Fr 72A). [This sheet will become the first sheet of F3.]
- ED copies the following poems onto a sheet, ca. spring: "Angels, in the early morning" (Fr 73A); "My nosegays are for Captives –" (Fr 74A); "Sexton! My Master's sleeping here."¹³² (Fr 75A); "The

131 Johnson and Leyda both date this letter April 1859; Habegger re-dates it to September to October 1859 based on an oblique reference to the time that has passed since Mary's miscarriage, but he also remains tentative about the date.

132 A possible "Master" poem; see Appendix 1.

Writings Retained

- ED copies the following poems onto one sheet, ca. autumn: "The morns are meeker than they were –" (Fr 32B); "Whether my bark went down at sea –" (Fr 33A); "Taken from men – this morning –" (Fr 34A); "Sleep is supposed to be" (Fr 35B); "If I should die –" (Fr 36A); "By Chivalries as tiny," (Fr 37A). [This sheet, bound in 1859, will become the fourth sheet in F3.]
- ED copies the following poems onto one sheet, ca. autumn: "I never told the buried gold" (Fr 38B); "I never lost as much but twice –" (Fr 39A); "I hav'nt told my garden yet –" (Fr 40A); "I often passed the Village" (Fr 41A). [This sheet, bound in 1859, will become the third sheet in F3.]
- ED copies the following poems onto one sheet, ca. late in the year: "There is a word" (Fr 42B); "Through lane it lay – thro' bramble –" (Fr 43B); "The Guest is gold and crimson –" (Fr 44B); "I counted till they danced so" (Fr 45A); "Before the ice is in the pools –" (Fr 46A); "By such and such an offering" (Fr 47A). [This sheet will become the first sheet of F2.]

Winter–Early Spring¹²⁸

Writings Circulated

- ED writes Catherine Scott Turner Anthon, about March, "I never missed a Kate before,..." (L 203).
- ED copies and sends "If she had been the Mistletoe"¹²⁹ (Fr 60A) to Samuel Bowles, ca. early in the year.

128 Two letters are dated only to ca. 1859, with no season indicated: ED to Susan Dickinson, L 201, and ED to Susan Dickinson, L 214. "A poor – torn Heart – a tattered heart," (Fr 125A) was sent to Susan Dickinson sometime in this calendar year, along with three poems (MSS lost) to unknown recipients: "Flowers – well, if anybody" (Fr 95[A]), "Success is counted sweetest" (Fr 112[B]), and "These are the days when birds come back," (Fr 122[B]). The letter-poem "When Katie walks, this Simple pair accompany her side," (Fr 49[A.1]) was probably sent to Catherine Scott Turner Anthon sometime between 1859 and 1861.

129 Habegger dates this MS to September to October 1859; Franklin's dating is, to me, more likely.

- ED copies and sends "The feet of people walking home –" (Fr 16D) to Susan Dickinson, ca. early in the year.
- ED copies and sends "Whose cheek is this?" (Fr 48A) to Susan Dickinson, ca. early in the year.
- ED copies and sends "My Wheel is in the dark" (Fr 61A) to Susan Dickinson, ca. early in the year.¹³⁰
- ED writes Mary Emerson Haven, February, "Dear Mrs Haven. / Your remembrance surprises me..."; her letter includes a copy of the poem "A darting year – a pomp – a tear –" (L 200; Fr Appendix 13, A13–6A).
- ED writes Elizabeth Holland, about 20 February, "Not alone to thank you..." (L 202).
- ED writes Elizabeth Holland, 2 March, "'Sister.' / You did my will..."; her letter includes a copy of the poem "As by the dead we love to sit –" (L 204; Fr 78A).

Writings Retained

- ED copies the following poems onto a sheet, ca. early in the year: "It did not surprise me –" (Fr 50A); "When I count the seeds" (Fr 51A); "Bless God, he went as soldiers," (Fr 52A); "If I should cease to bring a Rose" (Fr 53A); "One Sister have I in the house –" (Fr 5B). [This sheet will become the second sheet of F2.]
- ED copies the following poems onto a sheet, ca. early in the year: "'Lethe' in my flower," (Fr 54A); "To venerate the simple days" (Fr 55A); "I've got an arrow here." (Fr 56A); "I robbed the Woods –" (Fr 57A); "A Day! Help! Help!" (Fr 58A); "Could live – did live –" (Fr 59A); "If she had been the Mistletoe" (Fr 60B). [This sheet will become the third sheet of F2.]

130 Hart and Smith date this poem sent to Susan Dickinson "late 1850s"; see *OMC*, p. 80.

rainbow never tells me” (Fr 76A); “One dignity delays for all –” (Fr 77A); “As by the dead we love to sit –” (Fr 78B); “New feet within my garden go –” (Fr 79A); “I hide myself within my flower” (Fr 80A). [This sheet will become the second sheet of F3.]

- ED may have bound the sheets of F2 and F3 at this time.

Summer 1859

Writings Circulated

- ED copies and sends “Heart not so heavy as mine” (Fr 88[A]) to Catherine Scott Turner Anthon, ca. summer.
- ED copies and sends ““They have not chosen me; he said,” (Fr 87A) to Mary Bowles, ca. summer.
- ED copies and sends “Heart, not so heavy as mine” (Fr 88B) to Mary Bowles, ca. summer.
- ED writes Mary and Samuel Bowles, July, “Dear Friends. / I am sorry you came, ...” (L 189).
- ED copies and sends “If recollecting were forgetting,” (Fr 9B) to Samuel Bowles, ca. summer.
- ED copies and sends “Good night, because we must.” (Fr 97A) to Samuel Bowles, ca. summer.
- ED writes Samuel Bowles, late August, “Dear Mr Bowles. / I got the little pamphlet....” (L 193).
- ED copies and sends “Pigmy Seraphs – gone astray –” (Fr 96A) to Susan Dickinson, ca. summer.¹³³
- ED copies and sends “Low at my problem bending –” (Fr 99A) to Susan Dickinson, ca. summer.¹³⁴
- ED copies and sends “A throe upon the features –” (Fr 105A) to Susan Dickinson, ca. summer.¹³⁵
- ED copies and sends “Glowing is her Bonnet,” (Fr 106A) to Susan Dickinson, ca. summer.

133 Hart and Smith date this poem sent to Susan Dickinson “late 1850s”; see *OMC*, p. 82.

134 Hart and Smith date this poem sent to Susan Dickinson “late 1850s”; see *OMC*, p. 87.

135 Hart and Smith date this poem sent to Susan Dickinson “late 1850s”; see *OMC*, p. 88.

- ED copies and sends “So from the mould,” (Fr 110A) to Susan Dickinson, ca. summer.
- ED copies and sends “Success is counted sweetest” (Fr 112A) to Susan Dickinson, ca. summer.¹³⁶
- ED copies and sends “Ambition cannot find him!” (Fr 115A) to Susan Dickinson, ca. summer.¹³⁷
- ED copies and sends “‘Arcturus’ is his other name.” (Fr 117A) to Susan Dickinson, ca. summer.
- ED copies and sends “As watchers hang upon the East,” (Fr 120A) to Susan Dickinson, ca. summer.¹³⁸
- ED copies and sends “Her breast is fit for pearls,” (Fr 121A) to Susan Dickinson, ca. summer.¹³⁹
- ED copies and sends “South winds jostle them –” (Fr 98B) to Thomas Gilbert, ca. mid-late summer.
- ED copies and sends “South winds jostle them” (Fr 98[A]) to Louise and Frances Norcross, ca. summer.

Writings Retained

- ED copies the following poems onto a sheet, ca. summer: “She bore it till the simple veins” (Fr 81A); “We should not mind so small a flower” (Fr 82B); “This heart that broke so long –” (Fr 83A); “On such a night, or such a night,” (Fr 84A). [This sheet will become the fourth and final sheet of F4.]
- ED copies the following poems onto a sheet, ca. summer: “Whose are the little beds – I asked” (Fr 85A); “For every Bird a nest –” (Fr 86A); “They have not chosen me’ – he said –” (Fr 87B). [This sheet will become the third sheet of F4.]
- ED copies the following poems onto a sheet, ca. summer: “Heart not so heavy as mine” (Fr 88C); “Soul, Wilt thou toss again?” (Fr 89A); “An altered look about the hills –” (Fr 90A); “Some, too fragile for winter winds” (Fr 91A). [This sheet will become the second sheet of F4.]
- ED copies the following poems onto a sheet, ca. summer: “Perhaps you’d like to buy a flower,” (Fr 92A); “Water, is taught by thirst.” (Fr 93A); “Have you got a Brook in your little heart,” (Fr 94A); “Flowers – Well – if anybody” (Fr 95B); “Pigmy seraphs – gone astray –” (Fr 96B). [This sheet will become the first sheet of F4.]
- ED copies the following poems onto a sheet, ca. summer: ““Good night, because we must!” (Fr 97B); “South winds jostle them –” (Fr 98C); “Low at my problem bending,” (Fr 99B); “What Inn is this” (Fr 100A); “I had some things that I called mine –” (Fr 101A); “In rags mysterious as these” (Fr 102A); “My friend attacks my friend!” (Fr 103A). [This sheet will become the second sheet of F5.]
- ED copies the following poems onto a sheet, ca. summer: “A something in a summer’s Day” (Fr 104A); “A throe upon the features –” (Fr 105B); “Glowing is her Bonnet –” (Fr 106B); “Many cross the Rhine” (Fr 107A); “In lands I never saw – they say” (Fr 108A); “For each extatic instant” (Fr 109A). [This sheet will become the fourth sheet of F5.]
- ED copies the following poems onto a sheet, ca. summer: “So from the mould” (Fr 110B); “Artists wrestled here!” (Fr 111A); “Success is counted sweetest” (Fr 112B); “The Bee is not afraid of me.” (Fr 113A); “Where bells no more affright the morn –” (Fr 114A); “Ambition cannot find him –” (Fr 115B); “Our share of night to bear –” (Fr 116A). [This sheet will become the first sheet of F5.]
- ED copies the following poems onto a sheet, ca. summer: “‘Arcturus’ is his other name –” (Fr 117B); “Talk with prudence to a Beggar” (Fr 118A); “If this is ‘fading’” (Fr 119A); “As Watchers hang upon the East –” (Fr 120B); “Her breast is fit for pearls,” (Fr 121B). [This sheet will become the third sheet of F5.]
- ED may have bound the sheets of F4 and F5 at this time.

136 Hart and Smith date this poem sent to Susan Dickinson “late 1850s”; see *OMC*, p. 86.

137 Hart and Smith date this poem sent to Susan Dickinson “late 1850s”; see *OMC*, p. 87.

138 Hart and Smith date this poem sent to Susan Dickinson “1850s”; see *OMC*, pp. 91–92.

139 Hart and Smith date this poem sent to Susan Dickinson “1850s”; see *OMC*, p. 91.

1859

*Autumn–Winter 1859*¹⁴⁰**Historic National Events**

- October 16: John Brown raids the US arsenal at Harpers Ferry, Virginia; troops led by Colonel Robert E. Lee overpower and capture him two days later.
- December 2: John Brown is executed for treason against the state of Virginia.

Writings Circulated

- ED writes Catherine Scott Turner Anthon, ca. late in the year?, “Katie – / Last year at this time...” (L 209).
- ED writes Mary Bowles, ca. December, “Dear Mrs Bowles. / Since I have no sweet flower...” (L 196).
- ED writes Mary Bowles, 10 December, “Dear Mrs Bowles / You send sweet messages...” (L 212).
- ED copies and sends “These are the days when Birds come back –” (Fr 122A) to Susan Dickinson, ca. autumn.¹⁴¹
- ED copies and sends “Besides the autumn poets sing” (Fr 123A) to Susan Dickinson, ca. autumn.¹⁴²
- ED copies and sends “Safe in their alabaster chambers,” (Fr 124[A]) to Susan Dickinson, ca. late in the year.¹⁴³
- ED copies and sends “Going to Heaven!” (Fr 128A) to Susan Dickinson, ca. late in the year.
- ED copies and sends “Our lives are Swiss –” (Fr 129A) to Susan Dickinson, ca. late in the year.¹⁴⁴

140 Two timelines have served as sources for the historical timeline offered here: <https://www.nps.gov/gett/learn/historyculture/civil-war-timeline.htm> and <https://www.civilwartimeline.net/>.

141 Hart and Smith date this poem sent to Susan Dickinson “1850s”; see *OMC*, pp. 70–71.

142 Hart and Smith date this poem sent to Susan Dickinson “1850s”; see *OMC*, p. 71.

143 The complicated history of these MSS is not fully represented here; for additional information, see Fr 124 (notes) and especially *OMC*, pp. 96–100. In addition to the three (possibly four) MSS of the poem sent to Susan Dickinson between 1859 and 1861, ED sent a copy of the poem to T. W. Higginson in her first letter (15 April 1862); see L 260.

144 Hart and Smith date this poem sent to Susan Dickinson “late 1850s”; see *OMC*, p. 90.

- ED writes Elizabeth and Josiah Holland, September, “Dear Hollands, / Belong to me!” (L 207).
- ED writes Elizabeth Holland, December, “God bless you, dear Mrs Holland!” (L 210).
- ED writes Elizabeth Holland, December?, “Will someone lay this little flower...” (L 211).
- ED writes Louise Norcross, between 9 December 1859 and 7 January 1860,¹⁴⁵ “Since it snows this morning, dear Loo...” (L 199).

Writings Retained

- ED copies the following poems onto a sheet, ca. late in the year: “These are the days when Birds come back –” (Fr 122C); “Besides the Autumn poets sing” (Fr 123B); “Safe in their Alabaster Chambers –” (Fr 124B); “A poor – torn heart – a tattered heart –” (Fr 125B). [This sheet will become the third sheet of F6.]
- ED copies the following poems onto a sheet, ca. late in the year: “I bring an unaccustomed wine” (Fr 126A); “As children bid the Guest ‘Good night’” (Fr 127A); “Going to Heaven!” (Fr 128B); “Our lives are Swiss –” (Fr 129B). [This sheet will become the fourth sheet of F6.]

*Winter–Early Spring 1860*¹⁴⁶**Writings Circulated**

- ED writes Mary Bowles, ca. 1 January, “I should like to thank dear Mrs Bowles...” (L 213).
- ED copies and sends “Who never lost, is unprepared” (Fr 136A) to Susan Dickinson, ca. early in the year.¹⁴⁷
- ED copies and sends “A Lady red, amid the Hill” (Fr 137A) to Susan Dickinson, ca. early in the year.

145 See Habegger’s rationale for re-dating this letter: *My Wars Are Laid Away in Books*, p. 712n388.

146 The following writings are dated to the year 1860 only, not to a specific season: L 227 (ED to Elizabeth Holland); L 218 (ED to Mary A. Robinson Ward).

147 With the exception of “A Lady red, amid the Hill,” “Bring me the sunset in a cup –,” “I never hear the word ‘Escape,’” “Like her the Saints retire –,” “Papa Above!,” and “If pain for peace prepares –,” which are not published in *OMC*, Hart and Smith date the poems in this list sent to Susan Dickinson “late 1850s”; see *OMC*, pp. 88, 89, 90, 83, 84, respectively.

1860

- ED copies and sends “Bring me the sunset in a cup –” (Fr 140A) to Susan Dickinson, ca. early in the year.
- ED copies and sends “She died at play –” (Fr 141A) to Susan Dickinson, ca. early in the year.
- ED copies and sends “Exultation is the going” (Fr 143A) to Susan Dickinson, ca. early in the year.
- ED copies and sends “I never hear the word ‘Escape’” (Fr 144A) to Susan Dickinson, ca. early in the year.
- ED copies and sends “A little over Jordan,” (Fr 145[A]) to Susan Dickinson, ca. early in the year.
- ED copies and sends “Like her the Saints retire –” (Fr 150A) to Susan Dickinson, ca. early in the year.
- ED copies and sends “Papa Above!” (Fr 151A) to Susan Dickinson, ca. early in the year.
- ED copies and sends “‘Sown in dishonor?’” (Fr 153A) to Susan Dickinson, ca. early in the year.
- ED copies and sends “If pain for peace prepares –” (Fr 155A) to Susan Dickinson, ca. early in the year.
- ED writes Louise Norcross, ca. March, “The little ‘apple of my eye,’ is not dearer...” (L 215).

Writings Retained

- ED copies the following poems onto a sheet, ca. early in the year: “Who never lost, are unprepared” (Fr 136B); “A Lady red – amid the Hill” (Fr 137B); “To fight aloud, is very brave –” (Fr 138A); “‘Houses’ – so the Wise men tell me –” (Fr 139A). [This sheet will become the first sheet of F6.]
- ED copies the following poems onto a sheet, ca. early in the year: “Bring me the sunset in a cup –” (Fr 140B); “She died at play –” (Fr 141B); “Cocoon above! Cocoon below!” (Fr 142A); “Exultation is the going” (Fr 143B); “I never hear the word ‘Escape’” (Fr 144B). [This sheet will become the second sheet of F6.]
- ED copies the following poems onto a sheet, ca. early in the year: “A little East of Jordan,” (Fr 145B); “All overgrown by cunning moss,” (Fr 146A); “Will there really be a ‘morning?’” (Fr 148A); “Great Caesar!”

Condescend” (Fr 149A). [This sheet will become the first sheet of F7; ED does not copy the final poem onto this sheet until spring of 1860.]

- ED copies the following poems onto a sheet, ca. early in the year: “Like her the Saints retire,” (Fr 150B); “Papa above!” (Fr 151B); “’Twas such a little – little boat” (Fr 152A); “Sown in dishonor!” (Fr 153B); “She died – this was the way she died.” (Fr 154A); “If pain for peace prepares” (Fr 155B); “Surgeons must be very careful” (Fr 156A). [This sheet will become the third sheet of F7.]
- ED may have bound the sheets of F6 at this time.

Spring 1860

Writings Circulated

- ED writes to Lavinia Dickinson, late April, “Vinnie – / I can’t believe it,…” (L 217).
- ED copies and sends “Some Rainbow – coming from the Fair!” (Fr 162A) to Susan Dickinson, ca. spring.¹⁴⁸
- ED copies and sends “I cant tell you, but you feel it –” (Fr 164A) to Susan Dickinson, ca. spring.
- ED copies and sends “Dust is the only secret –” (Fr 166A) to Susan Dickinson, ca. spring.
- ED copies and sends “‘Mama’ never forgets her birds –” (Fr 130[A]) to Louise Norcross, ca. April.
- ED writes to Susan Davis Phelps, ca. May, “When thou goest through the Waters,…” (L 221).

Writings Retained

- ED copies the following poems onto a sheet, ca. spring: “I have a King, who does not speak –” (Fr 157A); “Where I have lost, I softer tread –” (Fr 158A); “She went as quiet as the Dew” (Fr 159A); “To hang our head – ostensibly –” (Fr 160A); “The Daisy follows soft the Sun –” (Fr 161A). [This sheet will become the second sheet in F7.]
- ED copies the following poems onto a sheet, ca. spring: “Some Rainbow – coming from the Fair!”

148 Hart and Smith date this poem sent to Susan Dickinson “late 1850s”; see *OMC*, pp. 85–86.

(Fr 162B); “By a flower – By a letter” (Fr 163A); “I cant tell you – but you feel it –” (Fr 164B). [This sheet will become the fourth and final sheet of F7.]

- ED copies the following poems onto a sheet, ca. spring: “I have never seen ‘Volcanoes’ –” (Fr 165A); “Dust is the only Secret.” (Fr 166B); “I’m the little ‘Heart’s Ease!’” (Fr 167A); “Ah, Necromancy Sweet!” (Fr 168A). [This sheet will become the fourth sheet of F8.]
- ED copies the following poems onto a sheet, ca. spring: “Wait till the Majesty of Death” (Fr 169A); “’Tis so much joy! ’Tis so much joy!” (Fr 170A); “A fuzzy fellow, without feet –” (Fr 171A); “At last, to be identified!” (Fr 172A). [This sheet will become the third sheet in F8.]
- ED may have bound the sheets of F7 at this time. At the time of binding, ED added two alternate lines on a separate slip of paper to “She died – this was the way she died” (Fr 154A).

Summer 1860

Writings Circulated

- ED writes to Catherine Scott Turner Anthon, “The prettiest of pleas, dear,…” (L 222), ca. summer.
- ED writes Samuel Bowles, early August, “Dear Mr Bowles. / I am much ashamed…” (L 223).
- ED writes Susan Dickinson, August, “Dear Sue, / God bless you for the Bread!” (L 224).
- ED copies and sends “A little bread, a crust – a crumb,” (Fr 135A) to Susan Dickinson, ca. second half of the year.
- ED copies and sends “Except to Heaven – she is nought.” (Fr 173A) to Susan Dickinson, ca. summer.¹⁴⁹
- ED copies and sends “To learn the transport thro’ the pain –” (Fr 178A) to Susan Dickinson, ca. summer.
- ED copies and sends “A wounded Deer – leaps highest –” (Fr 181[A]) to Susan Dickinson, ca. summer.

149 Hart and Smith date this poem sent to Susan Dickinson “early 1860s”; see *OMC*, p. 93.

- ED copies and sends “The sun kept stooping – stooping – low –” (Fr 182A) to Susan Dickinson, ca. summer.¹⁵⁰
- ED copies and sends “Just lost, when I was saved!” (Fr 132A) to Susan Dickinson, ca. late summer.¹⁵¹
- ED copies and sends “Though my destiny be fustian” (Fr 131[A]) to Elizabeth Holland, ca. late summer.

Writings Retained

- “*Mute – thy Coronation –*”¹⁵² (Dickinson drafts the second extant “Master” document, A 825/Fr 133A), ca. summer–autumn.
- ED copies (in pencil) “Did the Harebell loose her girdle”¹⁵³ (Fr 134A), ca. second half of the year.
- ED copies the following poems onto a sheet, ca. summer: “Except to Heaven, she is nought.” (Fr 173B); “Pictures are to daily faces” (Fr 174A); “I cautious, scanned my little life –” (Fr 175A); “If I could bribe them by a Rose” (Fr 176A); “As if some little Arctic flower” (Fr 177A). [This sheet will become the fifth and final sheet of F8.]
- ED copies the following poems onto a sheet, ca. summer: “To learn the Transport by the Pain –” (Fr 178B); “If the foolish, call them ‘flowers’ –” (Fr 179A); “In Ebon Box, when years have flown” (Fr 180A); “Portraits are to daily faces” (Fr 174B). [This sheet will become the second sheet of F8.]
- ED copies the following poems onto a sheet, ca. summer: “A wounded Deer – leaps highest –” (Fr 181B); “The Sun kept stooping – stooping – low!” (Fr 182B); “I met a King this Afternoon!” (Fr 183A). [This sheet will become the first sheet of F8.]
- ED may have bound the sheets of F8 at this time.

150 Hart and Smith date this poem sent to Susan Dickinson “late 1850s”; see *OMC*, p. 92.

151 Hart and Smith date this poem sent to Susan Dickinson “early 1860s”; see *OMC*, pp. 94–95.

152 This poem is included in the present constellation of “Master” documents.

153 This poem is never entered into the fascicles; R. W. Franklin suggests that it may belong among the “Master” documents; see Franklin, *Poems* (1998), p. 13.

Mute – thy Coronation – (A 825)

Date: Composed, or possibly copied from an earlier (likely initial) draft (not extant), and revised (alternate added) on the same occasion, in pencil, ca. summer–autumn 1860.

Material: One sheet (fragment: 75 × 112 mm) of cream, lightly ruled laid stationery later folded by hand vertically in half. There is a small tear in the bottom left corner of the fragment of paper.

Provenance: Discovered among Dickinson's papers after her death.

Initial custody: Unsent in Dickinson's lifetime; no evidence of circulation of a copy of or similar to this document has been found.

Secondary custody: MS likely passed from Lavinia Norcross Dickinson to Mabel Loomis Todd, ca. 1891; from Todd to Millicent Todd Bingham, ca. 1932; and from Bingham to Amherst College, 1956, where it was catalogued by Jay Leyda and assigned the number A 825.

Current custody: Amherst College Archives & Special Collections.

Scholarly publication history: MLT 1945, p. 174; THJ 1955, J 151; RWF 1998, Fr 133; CM 2016, p. 527.

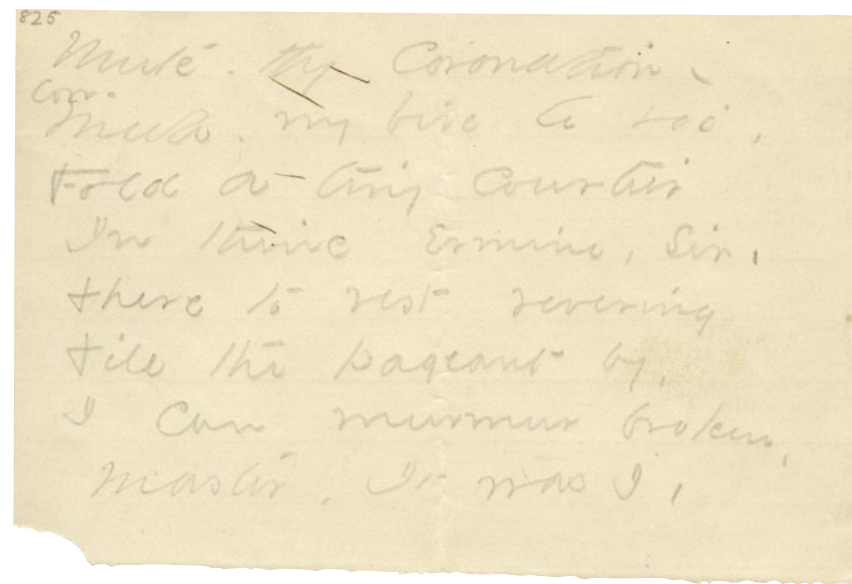
Summary of authorial interventions in the text: Leaf 1, line 2: ED proposed the variant “low –” for “Meek –” but left the reading unresolved. While it seems to have been ED's habit to place alternate or additional readings to the right or left and slightly above the line after the initial term, her private system of notation often allows for ambiguity in reading. Spatially, “low –” also stands below and to the left of “Mute –” in the line above, creating a constellation of related terms: “Mute –” “low –” “Meek –”.

Authorial changes to the document: Leaf 1, lines 1–4: ED or another agent tested a pen six times on the paper: four times on the writing side, two times on the non-writing side. The pen tests may have been made before or after Dickinson drafted the poem.

Mute - thy Coronation - (A 825)

Leaf 1

- 1 Mute - ~~thy~~ Coronation -
^{low -}
 Meek - my Vive le roi ,
 Fold a -tiny Courtier
 In ~~the~~ Ermine , Sir ,
 5 There to rest revering
 Till the pageant by ,
 I can murmur broken ,
 Master , It was I ,



THE WRITING LINE

1860

*Between A 825 & A 829**Autumn–Winter 1860***Historic National Events**

- November 6: Abraham Lincoln is elected president of the United States.

Writings Circulated

- ED writes Mary Bowles, soon after 7 November, “Don’t cry, dear Mary...” (L 216).¹⁵⁴
- ED writes Susan Dickinson, October, “Dear Sue – You cant think how much...” (L 226).
- ED writes Louise and Frances Norcross, mid-September, “Bravo, Loo, the cape is a beauty...” (L 225).¹⁵⁵
- ED writes Louise Norcross, December ?, “Dear Peacock, I received your feather...” (L 228).

Writings Retained

- None currently identified, though it is possible that “Mute – thy Coronation –” (A 825; Fr 133A) and “Did the Harebell loose her girdle” (Fr 134A), among others loosely dated to the second half or summer to autumn of 1860, belong to the autumn rather than the summer months.

154 Habegger convincingly re-dates this letter; see Habegger, *My Wars Are Laid Away in Books*, p. 717n422.

155 Although the manuscript of this letter has been lost, the internal evidence allows for some precision in its dating.

1861

*Winter 1861*¹⁵⁶**Historic National Events**

- February 8: Provisional Constitution of the Confederate States of America is ratified by a constitutional convention in Montgomery, Alabama.
- February 18: Jefferson Davis is inaugurated as the president of the Confederate States of America under its provisional constitution.
- March 4: Abraham Lincoln is inaugurated president of the United States.

Writings Circulated

- ED copies and sends “If it had no pencil,” (Fr 184A) to Mary or Samuel Bowles, ca. early in the year.¹⁵⁷
- ED writes Samuel Bowles, ca. early in the year, “Dear Mr Bowles / Thank you...”; her letter includes the poem “Faith’ is a fine invention” (L 220; Fr 202A).
- ED writes Samuel Bowles, ca. early in the year, “Mr Bowles. / Keep the Yorkshire Girls,...” (L 299).¹⁵⁸

156 The following writings are dated by Franklin to the calendar year 1861 only, not to a specific season: “The Juggler’s Hat her Country is –” (Fr 186A; L 330, ED to Samuel Bowles); “Title divine – is mine!” (Fr 194A; L 250 ED to Samuel Bowles); “I’ll send the feather from my Hat!” (Fr 196A, ED to Samuel Bowles); “Speech – is a prank of Parliament” (Fr 193A; L 252, ED to Samuel Bowles; Fr 193[B], ED to Frances and Louise Norcross); “Victory comes late” (Fr 195A; L 257, ED to Samuel Bowles); ED to Elizabeth Dickinson (L 188); “Through the strait pass of suffering” (Fr 187[A], ED to Susan Dickinson; Fr 187B, ED to Samuel Bowles); “Could I – then – shut the door –” (Fr 188A; L 239, ED to Susan Dickinson); “Morning’ – means ‘Milking” (Fr 191A, ED to Susan Dickinson); “When Cerements – let go –” (Fr 192A, ED to Susan Dickinson); “Some keep the Sabbath going to church,” (Fr 236[A], ED to an unknown recipient); “We, Bee and – I live by the quaffing” (Fr 244[A], ED to Louise and Frances Norcross); “Who robbed the Woods –” (Fr 57B, retained in ED’s private archive). In cases where Johnson and/or Habegger offer a more precise date, the poems and letters are also listed under seasons.

157 Habegger believes the poem, pinned around the stub of a pencil, was sent to Mary rather than Samuel Bowles; see Habegger, *My Wars Are Laid Away in Books*, p. 380. The tone, however, seems closer to that used in letters to Samuel Bowles.

158 See Franklin, *Poems* (1998), “Appendix 12: Re-dated Letters”; Habegger dates the letter uncertainly to May of the year; see Habegger, *My Wars Are Laid Away in Books*, “Appendix 5”.

- ED copies and sends “A feather from the Whippowil” (Fr 208A) to Samuel Bowles, ca. early in the year.
- ED copies and sends “I taste a liquor never brewed,” (Fr 207[A]) possibly to Susan Dickinson, ca. early in the year.

Writings Retained

- “Oh ‘ did I offend it –” (Dickinson drafts the third extant “Master” document, A 829/L 248, ca. late winter–early spring).
- ED copies “Nobody knows this little Rose.” (Fr 11C), ca. early in the year; it remains unbound.
- ED copies “South winds jostle them.” (Fr 98D), ca. early in the year; it remains unbound.
- ED copies “My River runs to Thee –” (Fr 219A), ca. early in the year; it remains unbound.
- ED copies the following poems onto a sheet, ca. early in the year: “Tho’ my destiny be Fustian –” (Fr 131B); “Tho’ I get home how late – how late –” (Fr 199A); “The Rose did caper on her cheek –” (Fr 200A); “With thee, in the Desert –” (Fr 201A); “Faith is a fine invention” (Fr 202B); “The thought beneath so slight a film –” (Fr 203A). [This sheet will become the second sheet of F10.]
- ED copies the following poems onto a sheet, ca. early in the year: “I’ll tell you how the Sun rose –” (Fr 204A); “A little Bread – A crust – a crumb –” (Fr 135B); “Just lost, when I was saved!” (Fr 132B); “Come slowly – Eden!” (Fr 205A); “Least Rivers – docile to some sea.” (Fr 206A). [This sheet will become the third sheet of F10.]
- ED copies the following poems onto a sheet, ca. early in the year: “I taste a liquor never brewed –” (Fr 207B); “Pine Bough – / A feather from the Whippowil” (Fr 208B); “I lost a World – the other day!” (Fr 209A); “If I should’nt be alive” (Fr 210A); “I’ve heard an Organ talk, sometimes –” (Fr 211A); “A transport one cannot contain” (Fr 212A); “Faith’ is a fine invention” (Fr 202C). [This sheet will become the first sheet of F12.]
- ED may have bound the sheets of F10 at this time.

Oh ' did I offend it – (A 829)

Date: Drafted and likely revised on the same occasion, in pencil, ca. late winter–spring 1861.

Material: One sheet, folded vertically into two leaves (each leaf = 187 × 123 mm) of wove, cream, gilt-edged, lightly ruled stationery embossed FINE | NOTE | PAPER in a decorated vertical oval (13 × 11 mm); the MS was later hand-folded horizontally in half.

Provenance: Discovered among Dickinson's papers after her death.

Initial custody: Unsent in Dickinson's lifetime; no evidence of circulation of a copy of or similar to this document has been found.

Secondary custody: MS likely passed from Lavinia Norcross Dickinson to Mabel Loomis Todd, ca. 1891; from Todd to Millicent Todd Bingham, ca. 1932; and from Bingham to Amherst College, 1956, where it was catalogued by Jay Leyda and assigned the number A 829.

Current custody: Amherst College Archives & Special Collections.

Scholarly publication history: MTB 1955, pp. 430–31; THJ 1958, L 248; YH 1960, II. 24–25; RWF 1986, pp. 21–30, in facsimile with printed transcript.

Summary of authorial interventions in the text:

Note: This document offers evidence of Dickinson's trial of composition. In this document we witness her experimenting, often moment by moment, proposing alternate constructions and trajectories for lines in the heated process of drafting. While Dickinson seems to have worked initially with a worn pencil—the lead marks left on the paper are soft, sometimes almost smudged—in another pass

through the text she used a sharper pencil when altering pronouns via overwriting and, on occasion, when adding variants or canceling text. The amount of time that elapses between these two compositional moments is unknown, but the impression given by the MS is that the second moment almost immediately succeeded the first.

Leaf 1, recto, lines 2–3: ED struck out these lines with three heavy, diagonal cancel marks.

Leaf 1, recto, line 6: ED proposed the variant “it’s” for “his” adding a comma after “his”/“it’s” at the same time to clarify the grammar of the sentence. The variant reading was left unresolved.

Leaf 1, recto, line 6: ED proposed “lower” as a variant for “meeker”—a combination of adjectives (“meek” and “low”) also used in “Mute – thy Coronation –”.

While it seems to have been ED's habit to place alternate or additional readings to the right or left and slightly above the line after the initial term, her private system of notation often allows for ambiguity in reading. Spatially, “lower” also stands just below and to the left of “smaller” in the line above, creating a constellation of related terms—“lower” “meeker” “smaller”—that seem to collectively underscore the speaker's condition. The variant reading was left unresolved.

Leaf 1, recto, line 8: ED canceled “who” with a single strikethrough.

Leaf 1, recto, line 12: A “c”-shaped mark appears inside the arc of the “A”.

Leaf 1, recto, line 16: ED added “all” above the line, possibly in her second pass through the draft with a sharper pencil. Its positioning, along with the fact that no words in lines 15–16 are canceled, introduces some ambiguity in possible readings:

“pushing aside the / blood and leaving her /all / faint and white in the / gusts' arm –”; “pushing aside the / blood and leaving her faint /all / white in the / gusts' arm –”.

Leaf 1, recto, line 24: ED proposed the variant “Heart” for “bosom” but left the reading unresolved.

Leaf 1, verso, line 2: ED proposed the variant “She” above “it” but left the reading unresolved.

Leaf 1, verso, line 4: ED proposed the variant “grazed” above “grieved” but left the reading unresolved.

Leaf 1, verso, line 6: ED canceled “life troubled” and proposed the variant “ways teased” above the cancellation.

Leaf 1, verso, line 6: ED proposed the variant “nature” for “sense” but left the reading unresolved. Here again, Dickinson's private system of notation allows for some ambiguity. Another possible reading of the line interprets “nature” as a possible variant for “life” and “ways”: “her odd – Back woods man life /ways / nature teased his finer sense”.

Leaf 1, verso, line 7: ED canceled three letters (“bea”?) of an incomplete word when another thought overtook her.

Leaf 1, verso, line 9: ED added the word “preceptor” above “grace”, possibly as a variant, “teach her preceptor”, or as an addition, “teach her grace – preceptor”; the reading remains unresolved.

Leaf 1, verso, line 11: ED proposed the variant “Dull” above “Slow” but left the reading unresolved.

Leaf 1, verso, line 13: ED proposed the variant “knows” above “learns” but left the reading unresolved.

Leaf 1, verso, line 16: ED proposed the variant “wordless” above “royal”, underscoring “wordless” and partially striking through “~~røyal~~” with the same stroke.

Leaf 1, verso, lines 17–18: ED first wrote “now – she stoops – a” then left a space and repeated the indefinite article on the next line when she wrote “a culprit –”; she then struck through “~~støops—a~~”, inserted “kneels” on the same line, and traced in heavier pencil “a” on the following line. She then subsequently struck through “~~nøw—~~” and partially underscored the beginning of “she”—which then she overwrote as “Daisy” to produce “Daisy kneels, a culprit –”.

Leaf 1, verso, line 19: ED canceled “~~offence~~” with a single strikethrough. The “f” of the variant “fault” is composed over the dash originally following “~~offence~~”.

Leaf 1, verso, line 20: ED canceled “~~nøt-sø~~” with a single strikethrough.

Leaf 1, verso, line 22: ED wrote “she” over “Daisy” possibly to adjust for the syntactic change in line 17. The overwriting in lines 17 and 22 may have occurred at the same time.

Leaf 1, verso, line 23: ED wrote over “do not” to form the word “don’t” using the cross-stroke of the “t” to cross out the final “ot” of “not”; this overwriting may have occurred at the same time as the overwriting in lines 17 and 22.

Leaf 2, recto, line 3: ED wrote “your” over “his” possibly at the same time she altered other pronouns in the draft.

Leaf 2, recto, line 8: ED wrote “with” over another illegible word or part-word.

Leaf 2, recto, line 10: ED canceled “~~māy~~” and “~~should~~” one after the other with separate single strikethroughs.

Leaf 2, recto, line 14: ED wrote “You” over “He” possibly at the same time she altered other pronouns in the draft.

Leaf 2, recto, line 22: ED wrote “much” over another illegible word or part-word possibly beginning with “h” or “ha”.

Leaf 2, recto, line 23: ED crossed out “~~If you~~” with a single strikethrough.

Leaf 2, recto, line 26: ED formed the “s” of “seek” over another illegible letter, possibly “f”.

Leaf 2, verso, line 1: ED canceled “~~whateve~~” with a single stroke.

Leaf 2, verso, line 2: ED introduced the variant “if” before or after canceling “out”.

Leaf 2, verso, line 10: ED formed the word “me” over an illegible word, likely “in”.

Leaf 2, verso, lines 14–15: ED canceled “~~glad / as the~~” in two separate strokes.

Leaf 2, verso, lines 21–23: The final lines of the text are difficult to parse. ED first wrote “Heaven will prove” but immediately abandoned the verb “~~prove~~” by crossing it out. She then experimented with the verb “disappoint” and adverb “only” placing “only” slightly above the line so that the text now reads, “Heaven will disappoint only me –”.

At this point she appears to be working in separate cells. In the left cell, under “disappoint me” she writes, “because its’ not so dear” while in the right cell, she seems to be testing various formulations for “prove” including “because” and “will be”.

She abandons the draft before indicating a final reading.

Editorial marks on the document:

Leaf 1, verso, line 12: Another hand, probably Millicent Todd Bingham’s, has written “wren” above the same word in Dickinson’s text; the editorial note clarifies the reading.

Leaf 1, verso, line 14: Another hand, probably Millicent Todd Bingham’s, has written “dares” above the same word in Dickinson’s text, while also re-tracing the final “s”; the editorial notes clarify the reading.

Oh' did I offend it - (A 829)

Leaf 1, recto

829

Oh' said I offend it -
~~did not it want me~~
~~to tell it the truth~~
 Daisy - Daisy - offend it - who
 bends her smaller life to
 his ^{its} meeker ^{lower} every day -
 who only asks - a task -
~~who~~ something to do for
 love of it - some little way
 she can not guess to make
 that master glad -
 A love so big it scares
 her, rushing among her small
 heart - pushing aside the
 blood - and leaving her
 faint ^{all} and white in the
 gusts' arm -
 Daisy - who never flinched
 thro' that awful parting -
 but held her life so tight
 he should not see the
 wound - who would have
 sheltered him in her
 childish ^{Heart} bosom - only it was'nt
 big eno for a Guest so large -

- 1 Oh' did I offend it -
 Did'nt ~~it~~ want me
 to tell it the truth,
 Daisy - Daisy - offend it - who
 5 bends her smaller life to
 his, ^{its} meeker ^{lower} every day -
 who only asks - a task -
~~who~~ something to do for
 love of it - some little way
 10 she can not guess to make
 that master glad -
 A love so big it scares
 her, rushing among her small
 heart - pushing aside the
 15 blood - and leaving her
 faint ^{all} and white in the
 gusts' arm -
 Daisy - who never flinched
 thro' that awful parting -
 20 but held her life so tight
 he should not see the
 wound - who would have
 sheltered him in her
 childish ^{Heart} bosom - only it was'nt
 25 big eno for a Guest so large -

This Louis - gives her
 love - and get-shit often
 flanders perhaps she
 gives ^{me} his taste - perhaps
 her odd - back words man
~~gives~~ ^{gives} his ^{man} ^{small}
 Louis ^{feels} knows all that -
 but - must she go ^{un-}
 pardoned - teach her ^{for all that}
 with her majesty -
 Sam ^{at} - ^{patron} ⁱⁿ things -
 even the ^{when} ^{open} her
 nest - ^{more} ^{than}
 Louis ^{has} ^{Paris} -
 Sam at the knee that ^{was}
 her once ^{and} ^{words} ^{out-}
~~now - Louis ^{is} ^a ^{knave}~~
 a culprit - all her
 her offence ^{was} - ^{was}
 if it is ~~not~~ so small
 you ^{it} ^{cancel} ^{with}
 her ^{lips} ^{is} ^{satisfied} -
 out punish - ^{do} ^{not} ^{can} ^{to}
 her - shut her in prison
 Sir - my ^{pledge} ^{that} ^{you}
 will ^{require} - ^{some} ^{time} -

829a

give the grave, and
 Louis, will not mind -
 she will answer in ^{less}
^{at} ^{times} -
 wonder ^{times} ^{me} ^{more}
 than the ^{few} - who ^{did}
 never ^{bring} ^{me} - but
 made ^{gay} ^{music} ^{with}
 his ^{might} ^{wherever}
 I ~~may~~ ^{should} ^{do} ^{go} -
 woman ^{was} ^{my} ^{bound},
 you ^{said} ^I ^{had} ^{no}
 else ^{to} ^{spare} -
 then ^{send} ^{the} ^{water}
 over ^{the} ^{clam} ⁱⁿ ^{me}
 brown ^{eyes} -
 I ^{is} ^{got} ^a ^{cough} ^{as}
 my ^{as} ^a ^{chance} - but
 I ^{don't} ^{care} ^{for} ^{that} -
 I ^{is} ^{got} ^a ^{tumbler}
 in ^{my} ^{side} ^{but} ^{that}
 don't ^{hurt} ^{me} ^{much},
~~if~~ ^{you} ^{her} ^{was}
 state ^{her} ^{more} -
 want ^{to} ^{come} ^{to} ^{her} -
 or ^{will} ^{to} ^{let} ^{her} ^{take} ^{him}

Oh ' did I offend it - (A 829)

Leaf 1, verso

Leaf 2, recto

This Daisy - grieve her
 Lord - and yet it often^{She}
 blundered^{grazed} - perhaps she
 grieved his taste - perhaps
 30 [5] her odd - Back woods man
 life^{ways} troubled^{teased} his finer sense^{nature} ,
 Daisy ~~bea~~ knows all that -
 but must she go un -
 pardoned - teach her^{preceptor} grace -
 35 [10] teach her majesty -
 Slow^{Dull} at patrician things -
 > Even the wren^{wren} upon her
 nest learns^{knows} more than
 > Daisy dares^{dares} -
 40 [15] Low at the knee that bore
 her once unto^{wordless} ~~royal~~ rest ,
 now - Daisy stoops - a kneels ,
 @ culprit - tell her
 her offence fault - Master \.
 45 [20] if it is ~~not~~ so small
 eno to cancel with
 her life , ~~Shey~~ is satisfied -
 but punish - do ~~n~~ ~~not~~ banish
 her - Shut her in prison -
 50 [25] Sir - only pledge that you
 will forgive - some time -

before the grave , and
 Daisy will not mind -
 she will awake in ~~your~~
 55 [4] likeness -
 Wonder stings me more
 than the Bee - who did
 never sting me - but
 made gay music with
 60 [9] his might wherever
 I ~~may~~ should did go -
 Wonder wastes my pound ,
 you said I had no
 size to spare -
 65 [14] You send the water
 over the Dam in my
 brown Eyes -
 Iv'e got a cough as
 big as a thimble - but
 70 [19] I dont care for that -
 Iv'e got a Tomahawk
 in my side but that
 dont hurt me much ,
~~If you~~ Her master
 75 [24] stabs her more -
 Wont he Come to her -
 or will he let her seek him ,

never minding ~~whatere~~
 So long wandering ^{if} ~~out~~
 to him at last -
 Oh how the sailor strains,
 when his boat is
 filling - Oh how the
 dying tug, till the angel
 comes. Master - open
 your eyes wide, and
 take me in forever,
 I will never be tired -
 I will never be noisy
 when you want to be
 still. I will be glad
~~as the~~ your best little
 girl - nobody else will
 see me but you - but
 that is enough - I
 shall not want any
 more - and all that
 Heaven will ~~prove~~
 disappoint me - ^{only} ^{because} will be
 its' not so dear

Oh' did I offend it - (A 829)

Leaf 2, verso

never minding ~~whatere~~
 So long wandering ^{if} ~~out~~
 80 [3] to him at last -
 Oh how the sailor strains,
 when his boat is
 filling - Oh how the
 dying tug, till the angel
 85 [8] comes. Master - open
 your life wide, and
 take me in forever,
 I will never be tired -
 I will never be noisy
 90 [13] when you want to be
 still - I will be glad
~~as the~~ your best little
 girl - nobody else will
 see me but you - but
 95 [18] that is enough - I
 shall not want any
 more - and all that
 Heaven will ~~prove~~
 disappoint me - ^{only} ^{because} will be
 100 [23] its' not so dear

THE WRITING LINE

1861

*Between A 829 & A 826**Spring 1861***Historic National Events**

- April 12: Confederates fire on Fort Sumter in Charleston Harbor, South Carolina, at 4:30 a.m.; Fort Sumter surrenders approximately thirty-six hours later. War is formally declared.
- April 15: Lincoln calls for 75,000 volunteers to put down the insurrection.
- April 17: Virginia secedes from the Union.
- April 17/18: Robert E. Lee rejects Lincoln's request to command the Union Army.
- April 19: Lincoln orders the blockade of ports in Confederate states.
- April 20: Robert E. Lee resigns his commission in the Union Army.
- April 21: Professor of Greek William Seymour Tyler preaches a sermon in the Amherst College Chapel; in its wake one hundred Amherst students try to enlist in the Union Army.
- April 23: Robert E. Lee accepts command of Virginia State forces. (He contemplated the Confederate offer for two days before accepting.)
- May 3: Lincoln calls for an additional 43,000 plus volunteers to serve for three years, expanding the size of the Union Army.
- May 6: Arkansas secedes from the Union.
- May 20: North Carolina secedes from the Union.
- May 24: Union forces cross the Potomac River and occupy Arlington Heights, the home of future Confederate General Robert E. Lee.

Writings Circulated

- ED copies and sends "Title divine – is mine!" (Fr 194A; L 250) to Samuel Bowles, ca. spring.¹⁵⁹
- ED copies and sends "I stole them from a Bee –" (Fr 226A) to Samuel Bowles, ca. spring.
- ED writes Samuel Bowles, ca. spring, "I cant explain it, Mr Bowles...."; her letter includes the poem "Two swimmers wrestled on the spar" (L 219; Fr 227A).
- ED copies and sends "No Wilderness can be" (the second stanza of "For this – accepted Breath –") (Fr 230A) to Samuel Bowles, ca. spring.
- ED copies and sends "What shall I do – it whimpers so –" (Fr 237A) to Samuel Bowles, ca. spring.
- ED copies and sends "I've nothing Else, to bring, you know –" (Fr 253A) to Samuel Bowles, ca. spring.
- ED writes Susan Dickinson, about April, "Will Susan please lend Emily 'Life in the Iron Mills –...'" (L 231).¹⁶⁰
- ED copies and sends "Musicians wrestling Everywhere!" (Fr 229A) to Susan Dickinson, ca. spring.
- ED copies and sends "A slash of Blue –" (Fr 233A) to Susan Dickinson, ca. spring.¹⁶¹

159 Habegger convincingly dates this poem-letter to Bowles to spring 1861; see Habegger, *My Wars Are Laid Away in Books*, "Appendix 5".

160 Hart and Smith also date this letter to spring (likely April) of 1861; see *OMC*, p. 95.

161 Hart and Smith date this poem sent to Susan Dickinson "1850s"; see *OMC*, p. 69.

Writings Retained

- **"A wife – at Daybreak" (Dickinson composes/copies the fourth extant "Master" document, A 826/ Fr 185A, ca. spring; it remains unbound).**
- ED copies the following poems onto a sheet, ca. early spring: "The Skies cant keep their secret!" (Fr 213A); "Poor little Heart!" (Fr 214A); "I shall know why – when Time is over –" (Fr 215A); "On this long storm the Rainbow rose –" (Fr 216A). [This sheet will become the fourth sheet of F9.]
- ED copies the following poems onto a sheet, ca. spring: "The murmur of a Bee" (Fr 217A); "You love me – you are sure –" (Fr 218A); "My River runs to Thee –" (Fr 219B); "It's such a little thing to weep –" (Fr 220A); "He was weak, and I was strong – then –" (Fr 221A). [This sheet will become the third sheet of F9.]
- ED copies the following poems onto a sheet, ca. spring: "Dying! Dying in the night!" (Fr 222A); "Morning – is the place for Dew –" (Fr 223A); "An awful Tempest mashed the air –" (Fr 224A); "I'm 'wife' – I've finished that –" (Fr 225A); "I stole them from a Bee –" (Fr 226B); "Two swimmers wrestled on the spar –" (Fr 227B); "My eye is fuller than my vase –" (Fr 228A). [This sheet will become the sixth sheet of F9.]
- ED copies the following poems onto a sheet, ca. late spring: "Musicians wrestle everywhere –" (Fr 229B); "For this – accepted Breath –" (Fr 230B); "We don't cry – Tim and I –" (Fr 231A). [This sheet will become the fifth sheet of F9.]
- ED copies the following poems onto a sheet, ca. late spring: "He forgot – and I – remembered –" (Fr 232A); "A Slash of Blue! A sweep of Gray!" (Fr 233B); "I should not dare to leave my friend;" (Fr 234A); "The Flower must not blame the Bee –" (Fr 235A); "Some – keep the Sabbath – going to church –" (Fr 236B). [This sheet will become the seventh sheet of F9.]

A wife - at Key, mark
I shall be.



Sunrise - hasten thou a flag for me
At-midnight - I am set a
maid.

How short it - takes to make
it I'dide!

Then - Midnight - I have passed
from the

^{over} Anti the East - and Pictory -

Midnight - Good night - I hear
them call -

The Angels sweet in the hall -
Softly - my Father's Climes the

A wife – at Daybreak / I shall be – (A 826)

Date: Composed, or possibly copied from an earlier (likely initial) draft (not extant), and revised (alternates added) on the same occasion, in pencil, ca. spring 1861.

Material: One sheet (one leaf, torn along right side: 202 × 127 mm) of laid, cream, blue-ruled stationery, embossed with a decorative frame (13 × 11 mm) containing a queen's head above the letter *L* and later hand-folded horizontally in half.

Provenance: Discovered among Dickinson's papers after her death.

Initial custody: Unsent in Dickinson's lifetime. Dickinson made two other variant copies of the poem, both in ink and in a fair hand: A 116, copied ca. 1862, remained among Dickinson's unbound poems; H 219, copied ca. 1863, was ultimately bound into F32. No conclusive evidence exists that any of the copies circulated beyond Dickinson's papers.

Secondary custody: MS may have passed from Lavinia Norcross Dickinson to Mabel Loomis Todd, ca. 1891(?); from Todd to Millicent Todd Bingham, ca. 1932; and from Bingham to Amherst College, 1956, where it was catalogued by Jay Leyda and assigned the number A 826.

Current custody: Amherst College Archives & Special Collections.

Scholarly publication history: THJ 1955, J 461n; RWF 1998, Fr 185A; CM 2016, p. 764n285.

Authorial changes to the document: On the recto, ED began and then abandoned an earlier message in ink: "Dear Friends – / I bring you so"; there is no apparent connection between the earlier (abandoned) message and the poem.

Summary of authorial interventions in the text:

Leaf 1, verso, line 10: ED proposed the variant "over" for "Unto" but left the reading unresolved.

Leaf 1, verso, line 19: ED canceled each word of the line "The ~~Vision flutters in the door~~ –" with a diagonal slash.

Leaf 1, verso, lines 20 and 22: ED's numerals suggest a change in the order of these lines, or parts of them. She may simply intend to reverse the order of the lines from "Master – I've seen the face / before – / Eternity – I'm coming, sir –" to "Eternity – I'm coming, sir – / Master – I've seen the face / before –"; alternatively, the positioning of the numerals may instead indicate a reversal only after the initial addresses to "Master" and "Eternity": "Master – I'm coming, sir – / Eternity – I've seen the face / before –".

826

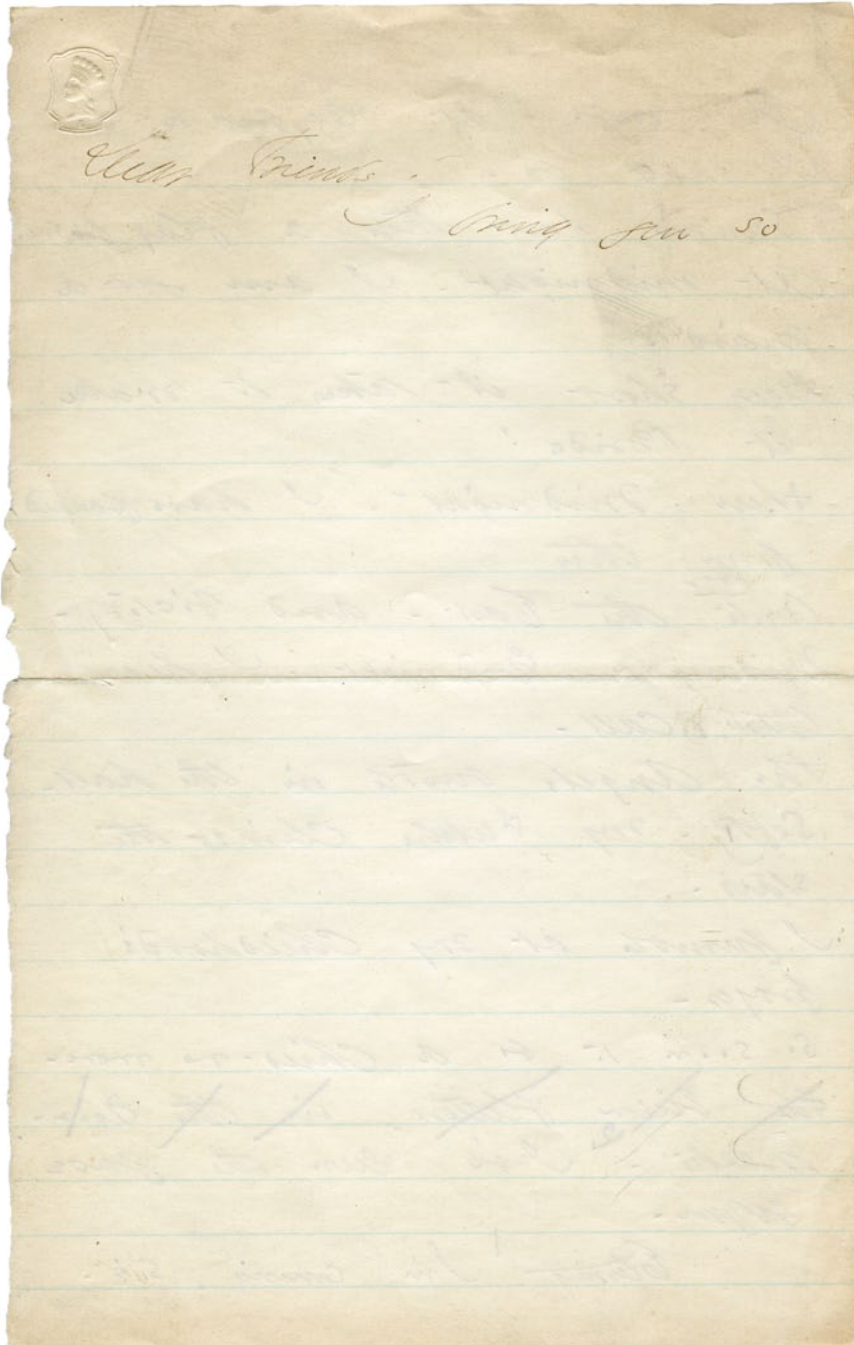
A wife - at Daybreak
I shall be -
Sunrise - hast thou a flag for me?
At midnight - I am yet a
maid -
How short it takes to make
it Bride!
Then - Midnight - I have passed
from thee
^{over}
Unto the East - and Victory -
Midnight - Good night - I hear
them call -
The Angels bustle in the hall -
Softly - my Future climbs the
stair -
I fumble at my Childhood's
prayer -
So soon to be a Child - no more -
~~The Vision flutters in the door -~~
Master - I've seen the face
before -
Eternity - I'm coming - Sir -

A wife - at Daybreak / I shall be - (A 826)

Leaf 1, verso

- 1 A wife - at Daybreak
I shall be -
Sunrise - hast thou a flag for me?
At midnight - I am yet a
5 maid -
How short it takes to make
it Bride!
Then - Midnight - I have passed
from thee
10 ^{over} Unto the East - and Victory -
Midnight - Good night - I hear
them call -
The Angels bustle in the hall -
Softly - my Future climbs the
15 stair -
I fumble at my Childhood's
prayer -
So soon to be a Child - no more -
The Vision flutters in the door -
20 Master - ² I've seen the face
before -
Eternity - ¹ I'm coming - Sir -

Leaf 1, recto



Dear Friends,

I bring you so

THE WRITING LINE

1861

Towards A 828

Summer 1861

Historic National Events

- June 3: The first skirmish of Union and Confederate forces in the East occurs near Philippi in western Virginia.
- June 8: Tennessee secedes from the Union.
- June 10: The first land battle of the war, the Battle of Big Bethel, occurs in Virginia.
- June 20: West Virginia breaks from Virginia, voting to remain in the Union along with Delaware, Maryland, Missouri, and Kentucky, even though they are slave states.
- July: The city of Washington is surrounded by a series of earthworks and forts for greater protection.
- July 4: Congress puts out the call for 500,000 more volunteers.
- July 21: The Battle of Bull Run (First Manassas) occurs in Virginia. (Civilians actually come out to watch the battle with picnic baskets but are appalled at the carnage: 4,878 casualties.)
- July 27: President Lincoln replaces Irvin McDowell with George B. McClellan as Commander of the Army of the Potomac.
- August: Frazer Stearns joins the 21st Massachusetts Volunteer Infantry Regiment as First Lieutenant. Professor of Chemistry at Amherst College William Clark also joins.
- August 10: The Battle of Wilson's Creek unfolds in Missouri. The first Union general, Nathaniel Lyon, is killed in action.
- August 28–29: Fort Hatteras at Cape Hatteras, North Carolina, falls to Union naval forces.

Writings Circulated

- ED writes Mary Bowles, about August, “Mary./ I do not know of you, a long while –...”; her letter includes the poem “My River runs to thee –” (L 235; Fr 219C).
- ED copies and sends “The Drop, that wrestles in the Sea –” (Fr 255A) to Samuel Bowles, ca. second half of the year.
- ED copies and sends “I Came to buy a smile – today –” (Fr 258A) to Samuel Bowles, ca. second half of the year.
- ED writes to Samuel Bowles, possibly in early summer; the letter (L 251) includes “Through the strait pass of suffering –” (Fr 187B).¹⁶²
- ED writes Samuel Bowles, possibly soon after 8 June, “Dear friend./ How hard to thank you – ...” (L 300).¹⁶³
- ED writes to Mary Warner Crowell, about August, “Dear Mary – / You might not know...” (L 236).
- ED writes Susan Dickinson, 19 June; her letter includes the poem “Is it true, dear Sue?” (L 232; Fr 189).¹⁶⁴
- ED exchanges variant versions of “Safe in their Alabaster Chambers –” (Fr 124C, D) with Susan Dickinson (L 238), ca. summer.¹⁶⁵
- ED copies and sends “Just so – Jesus – raps –” (Fr 263A) to Susan Dickinson, ca. second half of the year.

162 See Franklin, *Poems* (1998), “Appendix 12: Re-dated Letters”.

163 Franklin and Habegger both re-date this letter, moving it from Johnson's placement in 1864 to 1861. While Franklin re-dates the letter December 1861, Habegger believes it falls soon after 8 June 1861. Here he follows Leyda's *Years and Hours*, II, 28, and the evidence is convincing.

164 Hart and Smith also date this letter-poem to Susan Dickinson “about June 19, 1861”; see *OMC*, pp. 95–96.

165 Dickinson made several copies of this poem—two (one lost) in 1858 and three, including Fr 124C and Fr 124D, in 1861. For a complete textual history of this poem, see *OMC*, pp. 97–100, and Franklin's notes (*Poems* 1998) for Fr 124 [A]–[G]. In 1862, Dickinson sends another copy to Thomas Wentworth Higginson in her first 15 April letter to him.

Writings Retained

- “*Master . / If you saw a bullet*” (Dickinson composes and revises the fifth extant “Master” document; MS A 828/L 233, ca. summer–autumn).
- ED copies the following poems onto a sheet, ca. second half of the year: “We – Bee and I – live by the quaffing –” (Fr 244B); “God permits industrious Angels –” (Fr 245); “The Sun – just touched the Morning” (Fr 246A); “The Lamp burns sure – with-in –” (Fr 247A). [This sheet will become the first sheet of F10.]
- ED copies the following poems onto a sheet, ca. second half of the year: “One life of so much consequence!” (Fr 248A); “You're right – ‘the way is narrow’ –” (Fr 249A); “Safe in their Alabaster chambers –” (Fr 124E). [This sheet will become the fourth sheet of F10.]
- ED copies the following poems onto a sheet, ca. second half of the year: “The Court is far away –” (Fr 250A); “If He dissolve – then – there is nothing – more –” (Fr 251A); “I think just how my shape will rise –” (Fr 252A); “I've nothing Else – to bring, You know –” (Fr 253B). [This sheet will become the fifth and final sheet of F10.]
- ED copies the following poems onto a sheet, ca. summer: “What shall I do – it whimpers so –” (Fr 237B); “How many times these low feet staggered –” (Fr 238A); “Make me a picture of the sun –” (Fr 239A); “Bound – a trouble –” (Fr 240A). [This sheet will become the first sheet of F9.]
- ED copies the following poem onto a leaf, ca. summer: “What is – ‘Paradise’ –” (Fr 241A). [This single leaf will become the second leaf of F9.]
- ED copies the following poems onto a leaf, ca. summer: “It is easy to work when the soul is at play –” (Fr 242A); “That after Horror – that ‘twas us –” (Fr 243A). [This single leaf will become the fifth leaf of F11.]
- ED may have bound F9 in summer 1861.

Master . / If you saw a bullet (A 828)

Date: Composed, or possibly copied from an earlier draft (initial or intermediate, not extant), in ink, and revised both during composition or copying in ink and again on a separate but temporally close occasion in pencil, ca. summer–autumn 1861.

Material: 2 folded sheets (4 leaves; each leaf = 202 × 127 mm) of laid, cream, blue-ruled stationery embossed with a decorative frame (13 × 11 mm) containing a queen's head above the letter *L* and later folded horizontally by hand into thirds.

Provenance: Discovered among Dickinson's papers after her death.

Initial custody: Unsent in Dickinson's lifetime; no evidence of circulation of a copy of or similar to this document has been found.

Secondary custody: MS may have passed from Lavinia Norcross Dickinson to Mabel Loomis Todd, ca. 1891(?); from Todd to Millicent Todd Bingham, ca. 1932; and from Bingham to Amherst College, 1956, where it was catalogued by Jay Leyda and assigned the number A 828.

Current custody: Amherst College Archives & Special Collections.

Publication history: MLT 1894, pp. 422–23 (six sentences only); MLT 1931, p. 411 (six sentences only); MTB 1955, pp. 422–30, entire, in facsimile; THJ 1958, L 233; YH 1960, II. 22–23; RWF 1986, pp. 31–46, in facsimile with transcript; RWF 1998, Fr 190 (three verse lines only); CM 2016, p. 528 (three verse lines only).

Summary of authorial interventions in the text:

The nature of the revisions ED made to this document strongly suggest that she worked on the text on two separate occasions, creating two significantly different versions. The notes below are keyed to the second (later) version of the text; unless otherwise noted, the revisions were carried out in the later scene of writing and revision.

Through the notes I hope to represent the integrity of the texts in time and to mark the non-identity of the first and second versions of the text.

Sheet 1, leaf 1, recto, line 12: ED used eight diagonal pencil slashes to cancel “~~Sir-~~” and then proposed the variant “Master -” above the line.

Sheet 1, leaf 1, recto, line 13: ED wrote “I dont” over “He” in ink; the “H” is carefully reworked into the “I”. [First scene of composition and revision.]

Sheet 1, leaf 1, verso, lines 4–7: ED used multiple diagonal pencil slashes to cancel each word of the following passage, leaving only four words uncanceled: “~~in the Redeemed - I did'nt / tell you for a long time - but / I knew you had altered me - / I was tired - no more -~~”.

Sheet 1, leaf 1, verso, line 7: ED added “and” in pencil above “was”: “and was tired – no more”; her penciled “+” mark added above “more” points the reader to three verse lines at the end of the text possibly meant for insertion here: “+ No Rose, yet felt myself / a'bloom, / No Bird – yet rode in Ether –”.

Sheet 1, leaf 1, verso, lines 7–11: ED used pencil crosshatching to cancel the following passage: “~~so dear / did this stranger become, that / were it, or my breath—the / alternative—I had tossed / the fellow away with a smile~~”.

Sheet 1, leaf 1, verso, line 19: ED penciled “can” above “never”; she may be proposing it as a variant for “never” (“...if I can forget...”) or an addition (“...if I can never forget...”).

Sheet 1, leaf 2, recto, line 13: ED used multiple diagonal pencil slashes to cancel “~~but~~”.

Sheet 1, leaf 2, recto, line 15: ED carefully reworked the “e” in “breast”. [First scene of composition and revision.]

Sheet 1, leaf 2, recto, line 21: ED used multiple diagonal pencil slashes to cancel “~~reverent~~” and then proposed the variant reading “holy” (also in pencil) above it.

Sheet 1, leaf 2, recto, line 22: ED used multiple diagonal pencil slashes to cancel “~~reverently~~” and then proposed the variant “hallowed” (also in pencil) above it.

Sheet 1, leaf 2, verso, line 2: ED used multiple diagonal ink slashes to cancel “~~our~~”. [First scene of composition and revision.]

Sheet 1, leaf 2, verso, line 6: ED revised the line in pencil, first canceling “~~They~~” with multiple diagonal pencil slashes, then adding the underscored numerals “1” and “2” above the line to indicate a change in word order. The original line in ink, “They said a syllable – one of them –”, subsequently reads “one of them – said a syllable –”.

Sheet 1, leaf 2, verso, line 14: ED first added “remember that” in ink above the line [first scene of composition and revision]; then later [second scene of revision] she used multiple diagonal pencil slashes to cancel both words and the space between them.

Sheet 1, leaf 2, verso, line 17: ED added the letter “n” in pencil, changing “ever” to “never”.

Sheet 2, leaf 1, recto, line 2: ED added the words “like you –” in pencil above the line: “ – but if I had the Beard on / my cheek – like you – and you – had Daisy’s / petals”.

Sheet 2, leaf 1, recto, line 5: ED added the word “me” in pencil above the line: “Could you forget me in fight, or / flight –”.

Sheet 2, leaf 1, recto, line 14: ED used six diagonal pencil slashes to cancel “Eternity” and then proposed the variant “Heaven”, also in pencil, above the line. At the same time, she penciled in the word “too”, squeezing it into the line to achieve the reading “... but the / ‘Corporation’ are going too – so Heaven / wont be sequestered...”

Sheet 2, leaf 1, recto, line 15: ED continued revising the line in pencil, using multiple diagonal slash marks to cancel “at all –” and then proposing the variant “now” above the line: “...but the / ‘Corporation’ are going too – so Heaven / wont be sequestered – at all now –”.

Sheet 2, leaf 1, recto, line 18: ED used six diagonal pencil slashes to cancel “country” and then proposed the variant “fold” (also in pencil) above the line.

Sheet 2, leaf 1, verso, line 5: ED used five diagonal pencil slashes to cancel “of” then proposed the variant “for” (also in pencil) above the line.

Sheet 2, leaf 1, verso, line 16: ED used twelve diagonal pencil slashes to cancel “this summer”; she then used six diagonal pencil slashes to cancel “could” proposing the variant “would” (also in pencil) above the line.

Sheet 2, leaf 1, verso, lines 19–20: ED used twenty diagonal pencil slashes to strike out each word of the lines: “~~Would it do harm – yet we both / fear God –~~”.

Sheet 2, leaf 2, recto, line 8: ED used twenty-three diagonal pencil slashes to strike through each word of the question with which the initial version of the text ends: “~~Will you tell me if you will?~~”

Sheet 2, leaf 2, recto, lines 10–12: ED skipped a line and then added three lines in pencil: “I didn’t think to tell you, you / didn’t come to me ‘in white’ – / nor ever told me why –”; when the sheet is open, the lines almost mirror the echoing lines on the verso of sheet 2, leaf 1, verso: “What would you do with me / if I came ‘in white?’”


Sheet 2, leaf 2, recto, lines 14–16: ED skipped another line and then added three more lines in pencil: “+ No Rose, yet felt myself / a bloom, / No Bird – yet rode in Ether –”.

These lines, keyed for insertion on sheet 1, leaf 1 (verso), at line 7, also appear to be the last words she wrote when she returned to revise the text.

Master . / If you saw a bullet (A 828)

Sheet 1, leaf 1, rectro

828



Master .
 If you saw a bullet
 hit a Bird - and he told you
 he wasn't shot - you might weep
 at his courtesy, but you would
 certainly doubt his word -
 One drop more from the gash
 that stains your Daisy's
 bosom - then would you believe?
 Thomas' faith in Anatomy - was
 stronger than his faith in faith.
 God made me - ~~Sir~~ ^{Master} - I didn't
 be - myself - I don't know how
 it was done - He built the
 heart in me - Bye and bye
 it outgrew me - and like
 the little mother - with the
 big child - I got tired
 holding him - I heard of a
 thing called "Redemption" - which
 sets men and women -

1 Master .

If you saw a bullet
 hit a Bird - and he told you
 he wasn't shot - you might weep
 at his courtesy, but you would
 certainly doubt his word -
 One drop more from the gash
 that stains your Daisy's
 bosom - then would you believe?
 Thomas' faith in Anatomy - was
 stronger than his faith in faith.
 God made me - ~~Sir~~ ^{Master} - I didn't
 be - myself - I don't know how
 it was done - He built the
 heart in me - Bye and bye
 it outgrew me - and like
 the little mother - with the
 big child - I got tired
 holding him - I heard of a
 thing called "Redemption" - which
 rested men and women -

Master . / If you saw a bullet (A 828)

Sheet 1, leaf 1, verso

Sheet 1, leaf 2, recto

You remember I asked you
 for it - you gave me something
 else - I forgot the Redemption
 25 [4] ~~in the Redeemed - I didn't~~
~~tell you for a long time - but~~
~~I knew you had altered me -~~
~~I ^{and} was tired - no more - ⁺ so dear~~
~~did this stranger become, that~~
 30 [9] ~~were it, or my breath - the~~
~~alternative - I had tossed~~
~~the fellow away with a smile.~~
 I am older - tonight, Master -
 but the love is the same -
 35 [14] so are the moon and the
 crescent - If it had been
 God's will that I might
 breathe where you breathed -
 and find the place - myself -
 40 [19] at night - if I never forget
 that I am not with you -
 and that sorrow and frost
 are nearer than I - if I wish

with a might I can not
 45 [2] repress - that mine were the
 Queen's place - the love of
 the - Plantagenet is my only
 apology - To come nearer
 than Presbyteries - and nearer than
 50 [7] the new Coat - that the Tailor
 made - the prank of the Heart
 at play on the Heart - in holy
 Holiday - is forbidden me -
 You make me say it over -
 55 [12] I fear you laugh - when I do
 not see - ~~but~~ "Chillon" is not
 funny. Have you the Heart in
 your breast - Sir - is it set
 like mine - a little to the left -
 60 [17] has it the misgiving - if it
 wake in the night - perchance -
 itself to it - a timbrel is it -
 itself to it a tune?
 These things are ~~reverent~~, Sir,
 65 [22] I touch them ~~reverently~~, but
^{holy}
^{hallowed}

persons who pray - dare remark
~~the~~ "Father! You say I do
 not tell you all - Daisy confessed
 and denied not.
 Vesuvius dont talk - Etna dont -
~~the~~ said a syllable - one of them
 a thousand years ago, and
 Pompeii heard it, and hid
 forever - She couldnt look the
 world in the face, afterward -
 I suppose - Bashful Pompeii!
 Tell you of the want - you
 know what a leech is, dont
 you - and Daisy's arm is small.
 And you have felt the Horizon
 havnt you - and did the
 sea - never come so close as
 to make you dance?
 I dont know what you can
 do for it - thank you - Ina.

Master. / If you saw a bullet (A 828)

Sheet 1, leaf 2, verso

persons who pray - dare remark
~~the~~ "Father! You say I do
 not tell you all - Daisy "confessed -
 and denied not."

70 [5] Vesuvius dont talk - Etna - dont -
~~They~~ said a syllable - one of them -


a thousand years ago, and
 Pompeii heard it, and hid
 forever - She couldnt look the
 75 [10] world in the face, afterward -

I suppose - Bashful Pompeii!
 "Tell you of the want" - you
 know what a leech is, dont
 you - and Daisy's arm is small -

80 [15] and you have felt the Horizon -
 havnt you - and did the
 sea - never come so close as
 to make you dance?

I dont know what you can
 85 [20] do for it - thank you - Master -

Sheet 2, leaf 1, recto

828 6

 - but if I had the Beard on
 my Cheek - ^{like you} and you - had Daisy's
 petals - and you cared so for
 me - what would become of you?
 Could you forget ^{me} in fight, or
 flight - or the foreign land?
 Couldnt Carlo, and you and I
 walk in the meadows an hour -
 and nobody care but the Bobolink
 and his - a silver scruple?
 I used to think when I died -
 I could see you - so I died
 as fast as I could - but the
 "Corporation" are going ^{Heaven} ~~to~~ so ~~fast~~
 wont be sequestered - ~~at all~~ ^{now}
 Say I may wait for you -
 Say I need go with no stranger
 to the ^{fold} to me - untried ~~Country~~ -
 I waited a long time - Master -
 but I can wait more - wait
 till my hazel hair is dappled.

- but if I had the Beard on
^{like you -} my cheek - and you - had Daisy's
 petals - and you cared so for
 me - what would become of you?
 90 [5] Could you forget in fight, or
 flight - or the foreign land?
 Couldnt Carlo, and you and I
 walk in the meadows an hour -
 and nobody care but the Bobolink -
 95 [10] and his - a silver scruple?
 I used to think when I died -
 I could see you - so I died
 as fast as I could - but the
 "Corporation" are going ^{Heaven} ~~to~~ so ~~Eternity~~
 100 [15] wont be sequestered - ~~at all~~ ^{now}
 Say I may wait for you -
 Say I need go with no stranger
 to the to me - untried ^{fold} ~~Country~~ -
 I waited a long time - Master -
 105 [20] but I can wait more - wait
 till my hazel hair is dappled -

And you carry the cane -
 then I can look at my
 watch - and if the day is
 too far declined, we can take
 the chances ^{for} ~~of~~ Heaven -
 What would you do with me
 if I came in white?
 Have you the little chest I
 put the Alvin in?
 I want to see you more, Sir,
 than all I wish for in
 this world - and the world
 allows a little will be my
 only one for the skin -
 Could you come to Ben England,
~~the~~ ~~house~~ - ~~could~~ you come
 to Timbers? - would you like
 to come - Martha?
~~Would it do harm - set~~ ~~it~~
~~flat~~ ~~side~~ - could Clara disappoint
 you - no - she wouldnt - Sir -
 it men comfort - forever - just -

828 c

to look in your face, while
 you looked in mine - then I
 could play in the snow till
 dark - till you take me
 when Sundown cannot find
 us - and the trees keep
 coming - till the town is full.
~~What~~ ~~you~~ ~~will~~ ~~do~~ ~~you~~ ~~will~~?

I didn't think to tell you, you
 didn't come to me "in white",
 nor ever told me why,
 + No Rose, get felt myself
 R'blow,
 No Bird - set rods in ether,

Master . / If you saw a bullet (A 828)

Sheet 2, leaf 1, verso

Sheet 2, leaf 2 recto

and you carry the cane -
 then I can look at my
 watch - and if the Day is
 110 [4] too far declined - we can take
 the chances ^{for} ~~of~~ Heaven -
 What would you do with me
 if I came "in white" ?
 Have you the little chest - to
 115 [9] put the alive - in ?
 I want to see you more - Sir -
 than all I wish for in
 this world - and the wish -
 altered a little - will be my
 120 [14] only one - for the skies -
 Could you come to New England -
~~this~~ ~~Summer~~ - ~~could~~ ^{would} you come
 to Amherst - Would you like
 to come - Master ?
 125 [19] ~~Would it do harm~~ - ~~yet we both~~
~~fear God~~ - Would Daisy disappoint
 you - no - she would'nt - Sir -
 it were comfort forever - just

to look in your face , while
 130 [2] you looked in mine - then I
 could play in the woods - till
 Dark - till you take me
 where Sundown can not find
 us - and the true keep
 135 [7] coming - till the town is full .
~~Will you tell me if you will?~~

I did'nt think to tell you , you
 did'nt come to me "in white" ,
 nor ever told me why ,

140 [12] + No Rose , yet felt myself
 a 'bloom ,
 No Bird - yet rode in Ether ,

Reading Hours

Commentaries on the “Master” Documents

In unmarked and now unrecoverable hours in the years between ca. 1858 and ca. 1861, Dickinson wrote these works on leaves of paper that she saved for the remainder of her life. Because she saved them, we hold one vital clue to the missing foreground of her experimentation in the fascicles and in her later work. This experiment is not a language experiment only, but one, laid bare by the presence, either explicit or implicit, of an address, in writing to another: not to a particular other—though it may originate with the image of someone actual in the world, and A 827 may be a trace of that beginning—but to another describable only in writing and perhaps only fully real in the time of composing. Each of these works, whether composed in prose or verse or through their interlacement, employs its own tactics for addressing the other and for giving voice to the one who speaks-writes the text. If, at times, the “Master” documents claim synthetic ties one to another, at other times there may seem to be nothing unifying in their arrangement except their testimony to a textual experience that our usual, confining registers struggle to convey.

While the edition’s representation of these five texts is designed to restore them as far as possible to the times of their unfolding, in the commentaries that follow, I suspend the larger, time-bound argument I have been making for

the “Master” constellation as a whole to attend more intimately and more speculatively to Dickinson’s different modes of proceeding simultaneously in and against an established language: her own, her time’s, and certainly ours. Transcribing Dickinson’s writings offered me one way of following her. In transcribing the “Master” documents, I literally made my hands the channels for Dickinson’s written syllables, tracking her not only word by word but also moment by moment. The process of transcription encouraged my embodiment of these works and sometimes even imparted the feeling that I was keeping time with Dickinson. In the wake of the transcription process, however, a new sense of estrangement surprised me: the documents had been altered by my search for them and by my translation of them into a new medium. In the course of pursuing her, I had turned back into an outsider, and the documents appeared veiled again. Yet while the tangible, immediate connection I had formerly enjoyed with these writings had been broken, the distance in which they appeared opened a freer space in which to imagine and interpret them. My wish in the commentaries is to convey something of both experiences—that of the transcriber, who by means of a faithful tracking within each document may fleetingly collapse time and disclose the singular gait of Dickinson’s thought, and that of the belated reader, who

by walking among her lines and strikethroughs and variants in an untimely hour may reveal something of the mystery of our rapt connection to these documents as their now living interlocutors.

My commentaries do not lay claim to any special jurisdiction over the domain of Dickinson's "Master" documents, and they are but one of many possible paths through them. The commentaries follow the edition proper so that they may be unfastened from it and return to their first form as loose pages from my own reader's notebook, fragments from my private archive.

"What door – what / Hour –"

DICKINSON, *from Fr 1537B*

FIRST HOUR

The Hour of Flowers: A 827

You ask me what
my flowers said—
then they were
disobedient—I gave
them messages—

EMILY DICKINSON, from A 827

How late the world seems on a spring night; how close this message written over a century ago seems to come to us. Does our fascination with A 827 come from its prescience, its foretelling of the “Master” writings that will follow? Or is it rather the discontinuity, the rupture between A 827 and the later “Master” documents—two poems, one radically disordered draft, and a last incandescent work in prose and verse—that makes us fall backward into the mystery of A 827, as if we might also fall backward into an originary moment? Its unique and time-defying appearance in the spring of 1858 escapes explanation. The advent of A 827 seems at once *ex nihilo* and *sui generis*. Even if A 827 is only a

fragment of a longer, now lost correspondence or an extant witness of a writing experiment inadvertently saved, the extent of Dickinson’s literary experimentation in this text marks it as more daring—more prosodically prophetic—than anything we see in the verses of the early fascicles copied in the summer of 1858. Shuttling between iambic and trochaic meters, deploying assonance, enjambment, perfect, imperfect, identical, vowel, suspended, and eye rhyme, A 827, classified as prose by every editor, initiates a movement we will see again later in Dickinson’s writings: the re-description of the boundaries between letter and poem.¹⁶⁶

A consideration of time in Dickinson’s “Master” documents cannot end with an account of the dates on which they may have been written but also requires us to think about the many temporal dynamics that structure them and about the times to which they potentially give us access. Though it is written by a person who no longer exists, A 827 nonetheless gives us passage directly into a bright hour of a spring night in mid-nineteenth-century Amherst. It is through this more intimately writerly lens that A 827 is dated, in its deepest interior, in this hour

166 This point was established early on by Smith; see her *Rowing in Eden*, pp. 97–127.

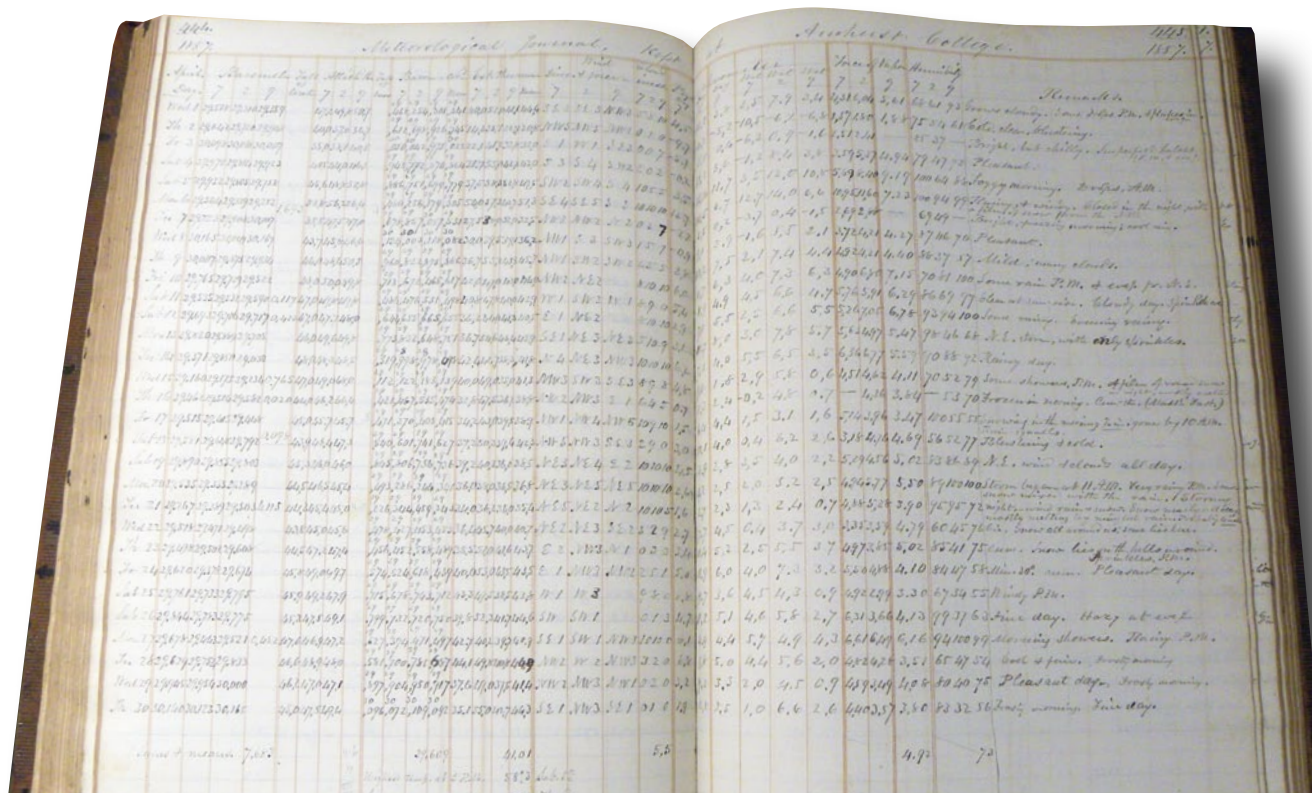


Fig. 18. The Snell Meteorological Journal, April 1857
Amherst College Archives & Special Collections

when the writer, perhaps recovering from an unnamed illness, lifts her “stronger hand” to address an interlocutor who seems to have sent word, after an unknown interval, of his own convalescence.¹⁶⁷



Fig. 17. A 827, ca. spring 1858, salutation (detail)

In this letter-poem, the salutation, “Dear Master”, is simultaneously introduction and dedication, and the sonic linkages in the opening and closing lines—*ill, tell, well; well, tell, tell, well*—are an intricate clasp locking the work from the inside. All through the body of the text short and long o’s—some muted (e.g., *more, stronger, thought, wonderful, flowers, love, shore, soon*), others purer (e.g., *eno; spoke, so, fro*)—combine with soft, murmuring s’s (e.g., *messages,*

167 The gender of the “Master” figure has been problematized by scholars and, most convincingly, by Smith. Although I do not believe that the documents were written to Susan Dickinson, or to another woman, the pronoun associated with this figure is uncertain. While I use “he” at times, I also follow Dickinson in using “It” to refer to the “Master”, and it is this latter form—at once ambiguous with regard to gender and even species—that I prefer.

Sabbath, Sabbaths) to impart a soothing, melodic undercurrent that carries us from line to line even as it almost perfectly conveys the hollow feeling of the body waking from sickness and falling once more into the beauty of the world it almost missed. Begun, moreover, in the immediate aftermath of surprise occasioned by the receipt of a message conveying the sound of a loved voice the writer had feared was lost forever—“I thought perhaps / you were in Heaven, / and when you spoke / again, it seemed / quite sweet, and / wonderful, and surprised / me so –” (7–13)—the poem-letter is a trove of wishes: “I wish that / you were well” (13–14); “I would that all I / love, should be weak no / more” (15–17); “I wish that / I were great” (27–28); “Will you / tell me, please to tell / me, soon as you are / well –” (57–60) (emphases added).

In a New World take on the Old World *reverdie*, Dickinson’s letter-poem marks the re-greening of the earth and its transfiguration into a temporal paradise that seems to have arrived during the period of the writer’s bodily withdrawal: “Indeed it is God’s house – / and these are gates / of Heaven, and to / and fro, the angels / go, with their sweet / postillions –” (22–27). In April of 1858, the Sabbath days fell on the 4th, 11th, 18th, and 25th of the

Fig. 19. The Snell Meteorological Journal, April 1858
Amherst College Archives & Special Collections

month. According to the weather journal kept by Ebenezer and Sabra Snell of Amherst, in April 1858, signs of rain marred the evenings of both the first and second Sabbaths, and the final Sabbath on the 25th was cold—just 28 degrees—and cloudy.¹⁶⁸ But on the third Sabbath in April, the record reads “Cirrus. Fine day”. Could it possibly have been on the night of 18 April that Dickinson made her “stronger hand / work long eno” (5–6) to write this spring letter-poem that never left her desk but that she saved for the long remainder of her life?¹⁶⁹ Here, nearly a quarter of a century before the passage of time led Dickinson to write to her friend Elizabeth Holland, “It sometimes seems as if special Months gave and took away – [. . .]. April – robbed me most – in incessant instances –” (L 775), we feel the light and temperatures shifting in the northern zone towards a nineteenth-century spring.

At exactly the mid-point of the letter-poem, Dickinson addresses the “Master” directly: “You ask me what / my flowers said – / then they were / disobedient – I gave / them messages –” (31–35). Here she introduces a figure—the flower—that will recur both in other writings of this constellation and within her larger oeuvre. Whether “flowers” serves as a code word for poems or alludes rather to the literal plants growing in Dickinson’s conservatory is ultimately less important than the independent agency with which she endows them. Neither allegorical representations of feminized nature nor exquisite adornments to the writer or her work, they are sentient beings, interacting dynamically with writer and world. In the prelapsarian space of this first letter-poem, Dickinson’s flowers, like John Milton’s in *Paradise Lost* or John Ruskin’s in *Proserpina: Studies of Wayside Flowers*, are expressions of a divine imagination that animates all matter¹⁷⁰:

168 The similar weather patterns of April 1857 and April 1858 further the ambiguity surrounding the dating of A 827. For more information, see my essay on the Snells’ meteorological journals, “The Weather (of) Documents” in *ESQ* 62, no. 3 (2016): 480–529.

169 Although I believe, like Leyda, Johnson, and Franklin, that this text was composed in the spring of 1858, there is still a remote possibility that it belongs to the purportedly textually blank spring of 1857. In April of 1857, the Sabbath days fell on the 5th, 12th, 19th, and 26th. The Snells’ weather journal recorded fog, rain, and northeast clouds on the first three Sabbaths in April, whereas on the final Sabbath of the month, the skies shone brightly until evening: “Fine day. Hazy at eve[nin]g”.

170 The Dickinson library held an 1819 edition of Milton’s *Paradise Lost*, inscribed “E[dward] Dickinson”, and Dickinson’s familiarity with the text is evident in her work; see especially L 1038, where she alludes to Milton as “the great florist”. While John Ruskin’s *Proserpina: Studies of Wayside Flowers* was first published in 1886, his floral studies belong to the 1840s.

“They said what the / lips in the West, say, / when the sun goes / down, and so says / the Dawn –” (36–40).



Fig. 20. A 827, ca. spring 1858, lines 31–32

The first (extant) “Master” document, part message, part poem, may also be an instance of inner speech with its inherent hiddenness and elusiveness.¹⁷¹ It is an invitation to another—the interlocutor—to enter a shared interior. When Dickinson writes, “Listen again, Master –” (41), she is not issuing a command but wishfully summoning his participation in the immanence of her vision. She asks him to experience the interval—the layers and distances, the time and separations—between touches as a sea: “Each Sabbath on the / sea, makes me count / the Sabbaths, till we / meet on shore –” (45–48). She asks him—whispers to him—to postpone their fall into time again—both imaginatively at hand and infinitely far away—when both will reach the shoreline together “and / whether the hills will / look as blue as the / sailors say –” (48–51).

The heart is the most powerful and least accurate device for measuring time. The hand crossing the paper keeps time more surely; when it falters, it is not time’s endlessness but her own ending that Dickinson records. At the top of the third page, a drop of ink may be a visible sign of her fatigue or a sign of nothing at all. The final turn of the letter-poem bends back into the world of time and sorrow. In this world, writing is painful work: “I cannot talk ↑stay↓ any more ↑longer↓ / tonight, ↑now↓ for this pain / denies me –” (52–54). While the labor of writing is underscored by authorial strikethroughs, Dickinson’s cancellation of “talk” signals both her acknowledgment—and interiorization—of the absence of the “Master” and the annulment of the fantasy of an intimate, synchronous communication between writer and addressee.

171 Although the boundary between inner speech and inner thought is blurred here, I have chosen “speech” over “thought” to foreground the persistence here of the voice—a known, loved, human voice in the imagination of the other.

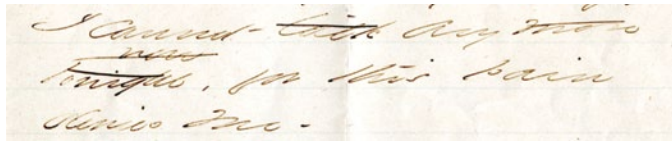


Fig. 21. A 827, ca. spring 1858, lines 52–54

These have been night words. And by the letter-poem's end, night has fallen. When Dickinson turns over the second leaf of the bifolium, she does not fill the paper but writes only a few lines: “tell me, please to tell / me, soon as you are / well –” (58–60). There is no signature, only an empty space stretching out beyond these lines.

Has she decided, already, that the message will not be sent?

Whether Dickinson made another copy and sent the new version from her desk at the Homestead to an address somewhere in her world and, if so, whether a reply from this address came sometime later is not known.

We do know that Thomas Johnson long maintained that many other messages belonging to this constellation had at one time existed. Franklin tacitly agrees, writing in the introduction to his edition of the “Master” documents, “Although there is no evidence the letters were ever posted [. . .], they indicate a long relationship, geographically apart, in which correspondence would have been the primary means of communication. Dickinson did not write letters as a fictional genre, and these were surely part of a much larger correspondence yet unknown to us”.¹⁷²

In Johnson's and Franklin's narratives, it follows that in the spring of 1858, Dickinson sent a copy—perhaps a variant copy—of the draft known as A 827 to an unidentified recipient and waited for a reply that may or may not have come. The image of a woman waiting for a letter is so old it seems without origins, so ubiquitous it seems always already understood. In Franklin's and Johnson's narratives, Dickinson has given up the prerogative of power. She is no longer a figure of agency but rather of longing.

Johnson and Franklin never imagine that Dickinson has not sent copies (variants, versions) of the messages she also saves. In their narratives, the very act of writing turns Dickinson into the one who awaits a reply, who undergoes the affective experience of waiting we (women) know so well. Yet it is not the “letter” that leaves the Homestead

but rather Dickinson who leaves the safety the Homestead represents by drafting it. As spring turns into summer, she takes up a new proximity to freedom, and she does not turn back. Instead of waiting for a reply between the springs of 1858 and 1860, when the next extant “Master” document appears, Dickinson copies (in some cases, *writes*) some 170 poems onto fascicle sheets and binds eight volumes of her work. The hour of A 827 is followed by a breach—of hours, days, even months and years—of correspondence, but not of writing.

SECOND HOUR

The Hour of Ermine: A 825

*Fold a tiny Courtier
In thine Ermine, Sir;*

EMILY DICKINSON, *from* A 825

In the “Master” constellation, this poem feels like an asterisk—a tiny, concentrated star or point of light—separating two tendentially more epistolary documents.

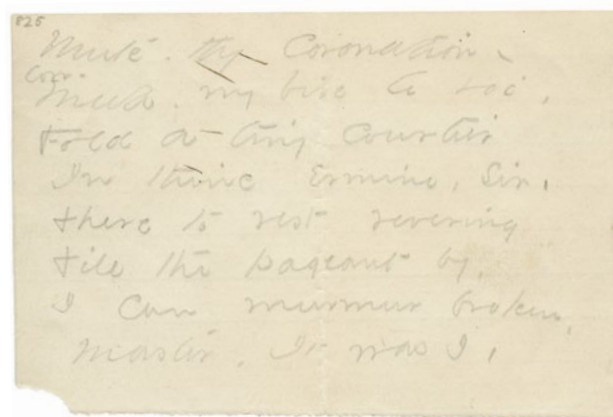


Fig. 22. A 825, ca. summer–autumn 1860

Mute – thy Coronation – appears to have been composed in the second half of 1860, not only at least two years after the first extant “Master” document, A 827, but also in the apparently empty interval between the end of summer in 1860 and the beginning of the new year. The time—the hour—is worth noting. As Franklin remarks, “Fascicles 5 through 8 occupied Dickinson steadily from

172 Franklin, introduction to *Master Letters*, p. 5.

the summer of 1859 until the summer of 1860. Then something halted her course: there were no fascicle sheets for the rest of the year.¹⁷³

Did Dickinson's work on the fascicles at times alternate with her work on this other experiment?

Mute – thy Coronation – was composed on a fragment of lightly ruled stationery folded vertically in half, perhaps to close or even cover the poem after its composition. While its eight iambic lines scan as two perfect quatrains, it is likely an intermediate draft, embodying the manuscript state between the initial composition of a poem and its potential transformation into a fair copy. The handwriting, with its high incidence of ligation and lack of flourish—the descenders of the *y*'s and *g*'s are wanting of their usual long left-sweeping curves—suggests both an accelerated speed of composition and a lack of care regarding its visual appearance. A 825 seems to have been meant for Dickinson's eyes only.

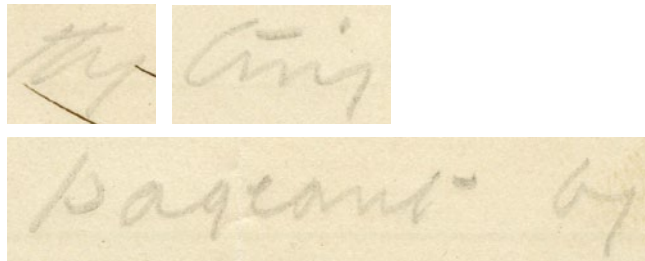


Fig. 23. A 825, ca. summer–autumn 1860, *thy*; *tiny*; *pageant*; *by* – straight *y* and *g* letterforms, lines 1, 3, 6 (details)

This document feels distant from A 827. The word horde from which Dickinson draws here is not that of the first extant “Master” document. In *Mute – thy Coronation* – the natural world evoked in the earlier epistolary document is replaced by the simulated world of pageant, even as spring greenness is superseded by the winter-white of ermine. The new constellation of images, the new series of associations apparently elevating the “Master” and reducing the speaker that coalesces in Dickinson's imagination in A 825 in the summer to autumn of 1860, persists into the late winter or spring of 1861, when she composes A 829, the third extant “Master” document. Perhaps this poem that never found its way into a fascicle or even a fair copy lay on or near Dickinson's desk, a material *promemoria*, when she turned once more to address the “Master” in A 829.

Both A 825 and A 829 proceed from the speaker's claim of “meekness” or “lowness”, sharing this variant reading; both imagine an intimate yet invisible enfolding in the body or dress—“Ermine”—of the “Master”; both allude to a brokenness in the writer.

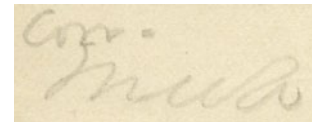


Fig. 24. A 825, ca. summer–autumn 1860, textual variants, line 2: *low*; *meek* (detail)

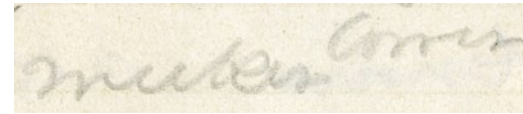


Fig. 25. A 829, ca. late winter–spring 1861, textual variants, line 6: *meeker*; *lower* (detail)

Here, though, is where the similarities between this 1860 composition, A 825, and the spring 1861 composition, A 829, seem to end, and still more striking differences surface. In A 825, Dickinson's speaker's thoughts are still arranged in quiet quatrains regulated by iambic highs and lows. When Dickinson speaks again, in this sequence/ constellation in 1861, her lines of prose register an intensely lived disturbance; her voice affronts us with its strangeness. Looking backward from the later prose draft, the poem inscribed on A 825 seems like a brief respite before Dickinson re-enters the trial of writing.

A small, even minor poem in the context of Dickinson's “Master” experiment, the larger significance of *Mute – thy Coronation* – lies in part in what it may illuminate about both the formal components of the “Master” constellation—namely, its inclusion of not only epistolary but also poetic forms—and the inter-generic nature of Dickinson's writing experiments between 1858 and 1861. While the fascicles embody the most sustained writing and transcriptional experiment of the years between ca. 1858 and ca. 1864, it seems likely that another, still more hermetic experiment expressed in the “Master” constellation unfolded alongside that of the early fascicles.

Yet this experiment is marked by not only a shifting between the epistolary and poetic but, still more profoundly, the presence of an unnamed interlocutor as a perfect dialogical foil, perhaps real but also certainly imagined, perhaps human but also beyond human and

173 See Franklin's introduction to *Poems* (1998), p. 21.

remote from the discourse addressed to him and sometimes to the more distant forms of “Thy” or “It”. The brevity of A 825, its status as a minor work, has led us to overlook it as the first site in which Dickinson crucially re-figures the “Master” as stranger, where the uncanny linking of intimacy and distance is quietly forged.

Coronation, pageant, courtier, ermine: these words are rare in Dickinson’s lexicon. From the net of the words that compose *Mute – thy Coronation* – another small constellation of poems from across Dickinson’s oeuvre emerges.¹⁷⁴ Most are markedly hermetic, difficult to interpret. In them, pageant is almost invariably associated with departure and coronation with eternity; the courtiers appear as seekers, closer to those who wait at the gates of Paradise than those who attend at court; and ermine is as sumptuous as love or death. In one, *Wert Thou but ill – that / I might show thee*, composed for or at least copied in Fascicle 40 just before Dickinson exited the fascicle experiment forever, a clustering of images—of illness, trial, and sentencing, of the Stranger—seems to recall at least one, possibly more fragmentary lines of narrative from the “Master” project, also long since ended.¹⁷⁵

The material condition of A 825, its existence as a small square of paper possibly folded to cover the text inscribed upon it, feels like part of its meaning. The most private and enigmatic of writings, the “Master” documents may structurally resemble prayers—vows or devotions—which, as the historian Michel de Certeau writes, “count on the expectation of the other. But [are] not sure of it.”¹⁷⁶ And while the reference point for this experiment—the

174 For poems including the word *pageant*, see “All these my banners be.” (Fr 29); “Inconceivably solemn!” (Fr 414); “Some such Butterfly be seen” (Fr 661); “The harm of Years is on him –” (Fr 1215); “Death is the supple Suitor” (Fr 1470); “One of the ones that Midas touched” (Fr 1488); and “Pompless no Life can pass away –” (Fr 1594). For poems including the word *courtiers*, see “Taken from men – this morning” (Fr 34); “She bore it till the simple veins” (Fr 81); “In rags mysterious as these” (Fr 102); and “Wait till the Majesty of Death” (Fr 169). For poems including the word *coronation*, see “The Day that I was crowned” (Fr 613); “Smiling back from Coronation” (Fr 651); and “One crown that no one seeks” (Fr 1759). And for poems containing the word *ermine*, see “The Guest is gold and crimson” (Fr 44); “One dignity delays for all –” (Fr 77); “In rags mysterious as these” (Fr 102); “I met a King this Afternoon!” (Fr 183); “No matter – now – Sweet –” (Fr 734); and “Wert Thou but ill – that I might show thee” (Fr 821).

175 Although perhaps philologically perilous, it is interesting to read this later poem, composed (or copied) around early 1864, next to the earlier possible “Master” poem “Again – his voice is at / the door –” (A 89-8/9), composed about early 1862 and never bound. If these poems—so full of doors, thresholds, openings—do remember the “Master” experiment, they do so in a more oblique way, encrypting the very address they seek.

176 Certeau, *The Mystic Fable*, vol. 1, *The Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries*, p. 187.

“Master”—appears only rarely as an unnamed yet singular address after 1861, the importance of the experiment continues to be felt in Dickinson’s conception of both poetry and letters as forms of communication depending not on reciprocity and symmetry but on the radical uncertainty of connection. In the “Master” documents, as in the work that follows, writing’s voice conveys both faith in the otherness that awaits it and a necessary accession to all that may, or may not, come.

THIRD HOUR

The Hour of Lead: A 829

*tell her
her offence fault – Master –
if it is ~~not so~~ small
eno to cancel with
her life*

EMILY DICKINSON, from A 829

Where—and by what forces—is Dickinson carried from the solicitude of A 827 and the humility of A 825, the first two extant documents in the “Master” constellation, to the trial of the third, A 829? How do we measure the distance between these documents?

In A 829, the restrained longing and the quiet reclamation of the beauty and strangeness that once approached her in spring and poetry, love and pain, are gone, deposed by a paroxysmal rage.¹⁷⁷ Bearing neither salutation nor signature, A 829 does not unfold as part of a sequence but survives instead as the record of a rupture. Whatever has

177 The strong possibility that A 829 is not “confessional” but instead the record of a literary experiment cannot be ruled out. In *My Emily Dickinson* (Berkeley, CA: North Atlantic Books, 1985), Susan Howe points to Dickinson’s use of work by the Brontës, Elizabeth Barrett Browning, and Charles Dickens in A 829 and concludes, “Far from being the hysterical jargon of a frustrated and rejected woman to some anonymous ‘Master’-lover, these three letters were probably self-conscious exercises in prose by one writer playing with, listening to, and learning from others” (p. 27). The first essay I ever published reads these documents as a re-writing of Charlotte Brontë’s *Jane Eyre* (1847). But is it absolutely necessary to choose between two (or more) interpretations? Would not a writer draw on those works that moved her even as she sought to structure a critical experience of her life? Why quarantine the many interpenetrating experiences of existence? To acknowledge a moment of rupture in a life need not be tantamount to pathologizing that life or reducing the value—formal and otherwise—of the documents that arise out of it or beside it.

occurred, the speaker is not who she was before. By revealing the non-identity of the writing self across time, the third extant “Master” document sounds the problem of the discontinuous nature of identity that ultimately troubles Dickinson’s entire poetic project.¹⁷⁸

Although we have no exact knowledge of where the “Master” documents rested among Dickinson’s papers, I am sometimes swayed by the argument that they must have lain together, otherwise the association between them would have been too fragile to hold. What really links them beyond the single lexical usage of *Master*, a word used in the first and third epistolary documents as a salutation—“Dear Master”—but then found only deep in the interior of the second epistolary document (A 829), which remains notably without address? The temporal distance of the three years between these two extant epistolary “Master” documents (A 827 and A 829) is only briefly interrupted by the short “Master” lyric of 1860 (A 825). But those three years hint at other forms of distance—spatial, psychic—that operate at the core of the “Master” experiment and that are more resistant to measure. For just as A 827 and A 829 belong to two separate, even severed, moments in time, so they also belong to two different worlds and two opposed mentalities. While the first describes and summons a prelapsarian, Edenic space through the language of flowers, the second laments the speaker-writer’s fall into an unconsecrated void.

Whether Dickinson addressed one or more human or inhuman interlocutors in the “Master” documents, whether there was a hiatus in the epistolary communications between the spring of 1858 and the spring of 1861, or, conversely, whether everything she wrote between these dates is an oblique message to the “Master(s)” are not questions that can be definitively answered. What we can say is that, first, in or around spring 1861, the withdrawal of a powerful, real or imagined, interlocutor appears to open a space in which Dickinson violently re-directs her

energies into writing; second, her language in this draft draws constantly and with a profound hunger upon the disorienting landscape of the New World; and third, no one, including ourselves, was ever meant to read this document. Even on a material level, the barriers to reading A 829 are considerable. A rough pencil draft, the stress of the occasion is widely legible across the handwritten leaves, where, in place of the elegant script of A 827, over-writing, blurred variants, and cancellations mar the surface of the FINE | NOTE | PAPER. A 829 cannot be considered part of a “correspondence” not only because of these material impediments or because no evidence exists that it (or a variant version of it) was ever sent or because no reply to it has been recovered but also because no return message is possible.

While the “Master” documents are all private documents, only A 829 is also in some profound sense an unreceivable, even unreadable text. It becomes virtually a private repository.

In the first epistolary work in the constellation, A 827, Dickinson’s speaker honors at least some of the conventions of epistolary writing: she opens with a greeting; she takes care to compose in a language that, while it scans as verse, also mimics the flow of rhythmic, cadenced prose. Most important of all, in this first extant epistolary document, we discover the speaker’s attentiveness to another being, the addressee. The message solicits an exchange of thoughts, beliefs, feelings; it awaits a response. Although no other documents seem to accompany this one—no earlier messages by Dickinson to the “Master”, no replies from that addressee—still it is conceivable that such exchanges may once have existed and that a dialogue now lost to time unfolded between them. So singular is this intuition that the belated reader of A 827, especially when unfolding and then turning the leaves of the manuscript, may feel as though she has intercepted a message intended for someone else.

A 829, by contrast, is no longer a transactional but rather a purely expressive text. The brokenness hinted at in A 825 now structures A 829, which appears to begin *in medias res*. Are leaves missing from the document? Although no one has yet suggested this possibility, we cannot rule it out since Dickinson’s habit—in fascicles and correspondence—was to stack separate bifolia one over

178 Approaching the question of identity from the opposite direction, Theodora Ward, who was among the first, after Bingham and Leyda, to see the “Master” documents, wrote, “The possibility of the existence of more than one correspondent must be considered in connection with the rough drafts of three highly emotional letters to an unnamed ‘Master’”. See Ward, *The Capsule of the Mind: Chapters in the Life of Emily Dickinson* (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1961), p. 151.

the other rather than interleaving them to create gatherings. Given this practice, it is conceivable that one or more sheets could have become separated from the extant sheet before being lost or destroyed. If no leaves are missing, the singular absence of a salutation may reflect the suddenness of the shock experienced by the speaker, perhaps her recognition that while she and the “Master” have shared a past, his/its present and future now depart from hers. In place of a letter, which often carries with it the hope for a reply, A 829 is a fantasy that operates as a replacement for an encounter.

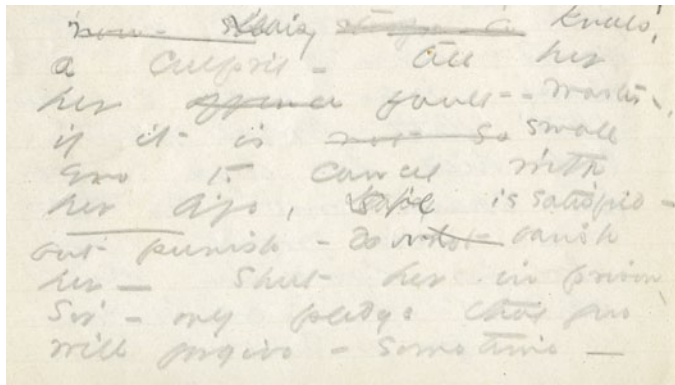


Fig. 26. A 829, ca. late winter–spring 1861, lines 42–51

From the outset, exclamation usurps the place of salutation, recurrently rending the text nearly until its close at the hundredth line:

Oh ' did I offend it – (1)

*Oh how the sailor strains, / when his boat is /
filling – (81–83)*

Oh how the / dying tug, till the angel / comes . (83–85)

Of the interjection “Oh”, the English poet Jeremy Prynne has written, “it seems chiefly to conjure a possible world internal to the feeling self. [...] Both in emotional reference and in grammatical function [Oh] seems locked unconstruably into the interiority of the uttering subject”¹⁷⁹. In Dickinson’s case, “Oh” seems to oscillate between inner speech and apostrophe; recognizably not narrative, “Oh” disrupts

connectedness and representational reference.¹⁸⁰ In the experience of love—albeit its loss—documented in A 829, language performs the speaker’s openness to wounding by the other. The speaker presents herself as touched, broken into in her subjectivity, unable to return to herself. An allusion to a disturbance that occurred in the past—“that awful parting –” (19)—is followed by paratactic references pointing to other, more present experiences of wounding. What is conveyed in A 829 is not the precise coordinates of the space she has entered but rather the incredible psychic acceleration the speaker experiences in the moment of entering it.

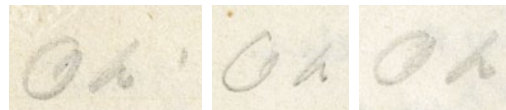


Fig. 27. A 829, ca. late winter–spring 1861, repeated exclamations, lines 1, 81, 83 (details)

Following her initial “outcrie”, the speaker is carried on the jagged backs of verbs ever further into a universe of annihilating abjection: *want, bend, flinched, blundered, grieved, grazed, kneel, cancel, punish, banish, shut, sting, waste, cough, hurt, seek, wander, strain, tug, come, open, take, will, want*.

One pervasive source of unease in A 829 issues from Dickinson’s intermittent use of the pronoun *it* where we would expect “he” or “Master” and, though far less frequently, “she” or “Daisy”. “It” may simply represent the noun in a neuter gender, but as Cristanne Miller long ago observed, in Dickinson’s poetry “it” also functions somewhere between being “directly referential, as grammatical subject, and as an unnamed blank in meaning”.¹⁸¹ Dickinson’s deployment of the pronoun here, moreover, associates both “Master” and “Daisy” with the inhuman world, albeit with different attributes and in vastly different scales. The “Master-It” embodies the inhuman in vastness of influence and absence of mercy; “It” is the “Guest” too big for the human heart to

180 I am grateful to Sharon Cameron for this insight; see the “O” repeatedly shifting between inner speech and apostrophe as Whitman deploys it in “When Lilacs Last in the Dooryard Bloom’d”: “O death, I cover you over with roses and early lilies” (7, 5); “O singer bashful and tender, I hear your notes, I hear your call” (9, 2); “O how shall I warble myself for the dead one there I loved?” (10, 1); “O what shall I hang on the chamber walls?” (11, 1); “O comrade lustrous with silver face in the night” (16, 13).

181 See Cristanne Miller, *Emily Dickinson: A Poet’s Grammar* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1989), p. 76.

179 J. H. Prynne, “English Poetry and Emphatical Language” (Warton Lecture on English Poetry), *Proceedings of the British Academy* 74 (1988): 140.

shelter; “It” is preceptor and majesty, judge and jailor; “It” is New World murderer—“Her Master / stabs her more –” (74–75)—and strange “angel” (84) who may or may not come and take “me in forever” (87). “Daisy-it” is small—“Wonder wastes my pound” (62)—a minor penitent who “bends her smaller life to / his ↑it’s↓↑, ↓ meeker ↑lower↓ every day –” (5–6), a culprit willing to “cancel” (46) her life in order to “awake in his your / likeness –” (54–55).¹⁸² Like the speaker and the “Master” of the 1863 poem *My Life had stood – a / Loaded Gun –*, they alone inhabit the landscape in which she seeks him/It, “so long wandering” (79) towards “royal-↑wordless↓ rest” (41), annihilation, and the end of desire: “I / shall not want any / more –” (95–97).

In A 829, the world that had been significant, meaningful, and engaging to the speaker has ended, and the world that rises up in its place, along with the sensations born with it, does so in proximity to an unspeakable loss. Although the break seems to have transpired sometime in the past, it is so saturated, so freighted with cryptic meaning that the speaker cannot integrate it into everyday life, nor can she move into the future, whose horizon it blocks. There is no linear time of the soul *in extremis*, no clear succession of the past, present, and future. Among the many barriers to reading the A 829 draft is the absence of virtually every external marker of time, place, and event. The speaker remembers only a “love so big it scares / her, rushing among her small / heart –” (12–14); “that awful parting –” (19); and a “wound” that made her hold “her life so tight” (20). There is still wind, the woods, the wren, and the bee. There is a memory, at least, of the sea, the angel, Heaven.¹⁸³ But these familiar agents and forces exist in a land, or mindscape, that includes strange sensations and anachronistic artifacts: a sting that does not come from the “Bee – who did / never sting me – but / made gay music” (57–59), a Tomahawk stuck in her side “that / dont hurt me & much” (72–73). Speaking out of the wound that is not named and cannot become part of the past, the speaker announces the world in alien ways, in a language no longer indexed to communication, and in a document marked or marred by cancels and illegible scribbles.

After filling the four sides of a single sheet of statio-

182 In the lines “awake in his your / likeness”, the cancellation of “his” is achieved through overwriting “your”.

183 And so, A 829 may after all carry some memory of A 827, where these words/concepts first appear.

nery with writing, Dickinson breaks off, leaving the final sentence suspended. Just as the A 829 draft has no proper beginning, so there is no formal closing. Rather, the speaker-writer navigating the rift between memory and history, between a past she has known and a future she cannot know, undergoes continual dislocation, shifting between familiarity and estrangement. On the final leaf of the manuscript, however, the speaker’s itinerary—the wanderings, cancellations, and resumptions of writing—first culminate in an image of absorption—“Master – open / your life wide, and / take in me in forever” (85–87)—then fall precipitately away. The pronominal instability, so marked earlier in the draft, resolves now, indicating, perhaps, the speaker’s return to herself, her re-entry into the small human world of “I / shall not want any / more” (95–97). The draft’s seismic lament and seismic resistance—earlier signaled through its transgressions against both measure and identity—have spent themselves. In the course of writing, perhaps by means of writing, the crisis has passed, the disaster has grown more distant.

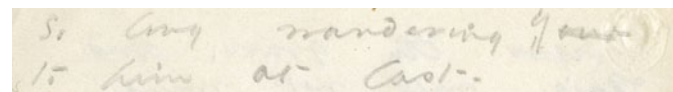


Fig. 28. A 829, ca. late winter–spring 1861, lines 79–80

Pierre-Marc de Biasi defines the literary draft as the “negligible domain of all that precedes the final version of the text: a sort of opaque space in which the structures of signification and style are not yet in place and that remains resistant to interpretive designs upon it.”¹⁸⁴ In A 829, the resistance to interpretative design may be especially strong because no later fair copy of the text exists that might help us to decode it. Its code, which belongs indelibly to its draft condition, frustratingly and tantalizingly resists us and seems to urge us towards unfounded conjecture. Yet Dickinson, who neither handed this trial of love and writing over to oblivion nor finished it for prosperity for readers she would never know, saved it.

At roughly the same time that Dickinson is drafting A 829, she is also striking out in a new direction in the fascicles.

184 See Pierre-Marc de Biasi and Ingrid Wassenaar, “What Is a Literary Draft? Toward a Functional Typology of Genetic Documentation”, *Yale French Studies* no. 89 (1996): 27.

In 1861, variant readings begin to appear with some frequency, undermining the idea of the single, finished poem and engaging the aesthetics of “choosing not choosing” that will be central to her poetics for the remainder of her writing life.¹⁸⁵ It does not feel coincidental that Dickinson’s long farewell to the “Master” and her leave-taking of the textual authorities she once imagined might place their *imprimatur* on her poems occur simultaneously. Not fully legible, and never exhausted by our readings of it, A 829 foretells the end of the teleological phase of the fascicle project even as it conveys a warning about the breakdown of the world. In its audible intensity, A 829 is more voice than text, a series of displaced enunciations that re-define the territories of poetic language and the registers of the written voice at once.

Instead of interpreters, Dickinson’s draft turns us into witnesses.

FOURTH HOUR

The Midnight Hour: A 826

*Then – Midnight – I have passed
from thee –*

EMILY DICKINSON, *from* A 826

In the “Master” constellation, verse may still operate as closure, a check against the roaming, centrifugal casting out of thought found in the longer trials of genre at the constellation’s core. Less anarchic in appearance than the draft that precedes it, A 826, *A wife – at Daybreak / I shall be* – may be an initial attempt to resolve the psychic disorder sounded in the fractured voices of the earlier document by bringing the speaker back within the bounds of the social order. In A 826, the series of thresholds that structure the poem are linked to an itinerary designed to effect her translation from “maid” to “wife”, and the speaker’s step-by-step movement seems at first so locked into the poem’s metrical unfolding as to make deviation from the course seem impossible.

Yet at “Midnight”, the speaker reports crossing over a boundary and also “pass[ing] from thee” (8–9), a referent so ambiguous that we may imagine she has passed not only through the apex of the darkness but also through the wide arms of the “Master”. The marriage day alluded to in the poem’s opening lines does not break at its end, where, in place of the time-bound condition of “wife”, a “face” she has seen before, the speaker summons a vision of eternity.

The mechanical, culturally inscribed fantasy collapses.

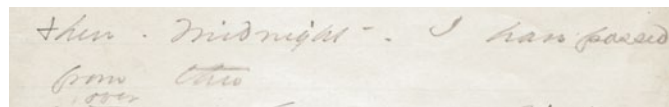


Fig. 29. A 826, ca. spring 1861, lines 8–9

Associated with the “Master” constellation, *A wife – at Daybreak* permits us a new and potentially recontextualized reading of A 829, hinting that the origins of the speaker’s wound may be traceable not to the “Master” rejecting her but to her choosing a life outside the conventions that structure his/its own. The anguished, bitter outcry with which A 829 opens—“Oh ' did I offend it – / Didnt it want me / to tell it the truth;” (1–3)—convicts her, not him, of a first and violent infraction against love’s social order.

A poem’s meaning does not derive only from the reproduction of its words but also from its meshwork of relationships with history, time, and place. In the spring of 1861, when Dickinson drafts A 826, she is drafting a private poem, and the 1861 *A wife – at Daybreak* (A 826) remains in its draft (un)dress: it does not enter the fascicles; it does not circulate beyond Dickinson’s work space. Indeed, a full year must pass before Dickinson returns to the poem and makes a fair copy, and then yet another year passes before she makes a third copy and binds it into Fascicle 32. Each of the two subsequent copies (1862, 1863) is a variant version of the first draft of 1861; each marks its distance from A 826 and the “Master” experiment. The 1862 manuscript (A 116) is composed in ink on two leaves of stationery.¹⁸⁶ Neither folded nor addressed, it does not seem to have been prepared for sending. Nor was it prepared for binding, since in copying the poem Dickinson wrote only on the

185 See Cameron’s *Choosing Not Choosing*.

186 For the variant versions of A 826, see Appendices 1 and 2.

recto of the first and second leaves, separating them with a blank verso, a situation that would have created a unique and awkwardly unusable leaf in a fascicle.

But perhaps the most significant change between A 826 and A 116 is not material but textual: in A 116 there is an exchange of bodies: “Master” is replaced by “Savior”, at once an elevation but also a reduction—diminution—of the panoramic connotations of “Master”. While, like A 826, A 116 remains among Dickinson’s papers, it no longer summons, and it is no longer reserved for a particular subject, but through this change of address, it is instead re-directed away from the “Master” experiment and away, too, from the intimate inscription of vulnerability and contingency that are its conditions.

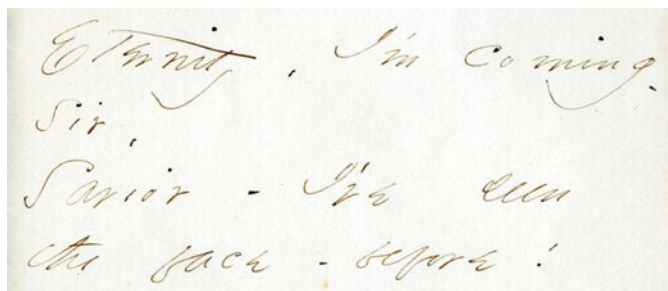


Fig. 30. A 116, ca. 1862, last lines

Given the direction of A 116, we would expect the third variant version of the poem, H 219, copied in the second half of 1863, to depart still more fully from the original. Yet for this fascicle version of the poem, Dickinson returned to the spring 1861 text, restoring the address “Master” to the poem’s final lines.

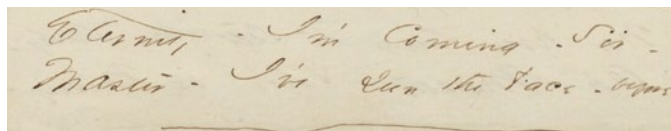


Fig. 31. H 219, ca. second half of 1863, last lines

Why, more than two years after first drafting this poem, Dickinson at last set a new version of *A Wife – at Daybreak* – (H 219) in a fascicle is not known. Was she laying the figure of the “Master” to rest or bringing him/It to life again? The sudden appearance of the “Master” in this fascicle draws to a singular focus on a single folded sheet of two leaves the subject of her “Master” experiments.

The haunting intertextual relations among the poems that share the same fascicle sheet—itsself the final sheet in Fascicle 32—are difficult to interpret. The first two, *A Wife – at Daybreak* – and *Why make it doubt – it*, on the recto and verso of the first leaf of the sheet, address the “Master” directly in their concluding lines: “Master – I’ve seen the Face – before –”; “Oh ‘ Master ‘ This is Misery –”. In the latter two, *I live with Him – I see / His face* – and *The power to be true to You*, the address is implicit in the poems’ intimacy. Like the earlier “Master” documents, none of these poems seem ever to have circulated beyond the fascicle, and although all four are fully resolved, they feel veiled and inaccessible. In the context of Fascicle 32, this last sheet contains a doubly operative set of texts, both self-contained on the folded sheet and self-sealing for the fascicle, both closing and re-opening the “Master” experiment of ca. 1858 to ca. 1861.

Although *A wife – at Daybreak* is the only “Master” document that exists in multiple manuscripts and that claims a textual home both inside and outside the fascicles, it complicates our understanding of the boundaries of this constellation and the larger boundaries of Dickinson’s works.

The singular nature and significance of A 826 is only underscored by the presence of additional manuscripts carrying variant texts with variant histories.¹⁸⁷ Whatever the nature of Dickinson’s unrecoverable intentions, the length of time the text inscribed on this document remained outside the fascicles suggests that she was ambivalent about committing it to the most durable record of her work. Yet in violation of her usual practice in the 1850s and 1860s of destroying draft copies after entering record copies in the fascicles, Dickinson held onto A 826, as a memento, perhaps, or a link to the largely hidden events of spring 1861.

In this earlier spring, its closest associations are to A 829, the disordered draft it follows, and A 828, the final extant document in the “Master” constellation written just

187 In Dickinson’s oeuvre, a single text is often represented by multiple manuscripts written around the same time or in different seasons and even years. In these cases, it is necessary to consider not only the ways in which textual variants between and among the manuscripts complicate issues of authorial intention and address but also how the different textual histories of individual manuscripts deepen such complications.

a few months after A 826. In this spring, as the light and temperatures are once again rising, so Dickinson's internal conditions also seem to have been changing. From the depths of A 829, Dickinson emerged to draft the last two extant documents of the ca. 1858 to ca. 1861 "Master" constellation on sheets of laid, cream, blue-ruled stationery embossed with a decorative frame containing a queen's head above the letter *L*. As the poet and scholar Susan Howe wrote in 1991, for Dickinson, "[t]he physical act of copying is a mysterious sensuous expression. [. . .] She paid attention to the smallest physical details of the page. Embossed seals in the corner of recto and verso leaves are part of the fictitious real."¹⁸⁸

The queen's head is associated with a brief but significant period—and, perhaps even more significantly, with a series of events, a train of thinking, a moment when prose and verse were closer together than ever before or after. What new constellations of documents would come to light, what possible connections, associations, and resonances would materialize if we were to read *all* of the works composed on paper embossed with a queen's head?¹⁸⁹ In this spring-turning-into-summer, message, medium, chance, and authorial intention converge in a private, experimental poetics of infinite postponement.

FIFTH HOUR

The Queen's Hour: A 828

*if I wish
with a might I cannot
repress – that mine were the
Queen's place – the love of
the – Plantagenet is my only
apology –*

EMILY DICKINSON, *from* A 828

A 828 feels like an apotheosis. In A 828, Dickinson's speaker returns from the hour of lead. To mark this return, Dickinson writes in a beautiful fair copy hand. A new adeptness is apparent in the negotiation of the epistolary dynamics of presence and absence: in A 828, Dickinson gives an account of the speaker's experience of the intricate interweaving of gender, sexuality, autonomy, and dissent in a language that freely crosses genre boundaries and that needs no authorization from outside. While there are many material cruxes that lead us to question the precise nature of the "Master" documents' connections to one another, there are also intimations—textual and philological—that ultimately affirm that the association is not arbitrary. The multiplicity of drives organizing the earlier epistolary, indeterminate, and verse texts converge here, and while nothing in these earlier texts can predict the extraordinary vision conjured in A 828, read in retrospect each may be seen as an auger of this final extant document. The speaker's probing of the future is thus balanced by an engagement with the past manifest in her oblique retrieval of the language and imagery of all that has come before.

Indeed, although at least three years have elapsed between the first extant document in the constellation, A 827, and this last extant document, A 828, the images organizing the first missive—flowers, the Sabbath, sundown, and the sea—return, changed, in the last. In A 827, love is a sea on which the speaker drifts, "count[ing] / the Sabbaths, till we / meet on shore –" (46–48); in A 828, she asks the "Master" to remember the disturbing sensation of the sea coming "so close as / to make you dance" (82–83). In A 827, the speaker's flowers whisper "what the / lips in the West, say, / when the sun goes / down" (36–39); in A 828, she

188 Susan Howe, "These Flames and Generosities of the Heart: Emily Dickinson and the Illogic of Sumptuary Values", *Sulfur* 28 (Spring 1991): 143.

189 Although no full-scale study of Dickinson's use of papers has been published, Dickinson's use of papers in the fascicles as well as in certain correspondences suggest the need for a further investigation on the linkage of materials to the practice of authorship. Can we surmise that Dickinson kept separate paper stocks that she used "with purpose" until she ran out? Did she collect paper stocks that were similar for uniformity in appearance? See R. W. Franklin's notes on paper types in the fascicles in *The Manuscript Books of Emily Dickinson*, 2 vols. (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1981), pp. 1407–12.

fantasizes “play[ing] in the woods –” (131) till the “Master” “take[s] me / where sundown cannot find / us –” (132–34). Similarly, the trappings of sovereignty in the earlier poem traced on A 825—coronation, the robes of ermine—also resurface in A 828 in allusions to the House of “Plantagenet” (47) and the “new coat – that the Tailor / made –” (50–51). More important, perhaps, the “rest in revering” (5) that the speaker of A 825 experiences is unsettled in A 828, when, “the pageant by” (A 825, 6), she forgets “the Redemption / in the Redeemed—” (24–25).

The temporal proximity of A 828 to both A 829 and A 826—separated, perhaps, by the gap of only a few months—puts them in a still more intimately charged relation to one another. In A 828, the “marriage” trope of A 826 falls away, while the destroyed associations expressed in the fractured images of wounding that rend A 829 are mended, re-gathered in a series of tropes that carry us from the opening conceit of the shot bird to its transfiguration into a vehicle for the poet’s voice “[riding] in Ether –” (142). Although no single phrase of A 829 returns in A 828, there is much to suggest that the earlier text may be a raw trial of the latter.

A 828 arises out of the dialectics of memory and forgetting. Without ever naming what befell her, the speaker-writer in A 829 conveyed her annihilating experience of a loss that deprived her of the power to describe her condition except as a series of rapidly and disparately changing image flashes. In A 828, the speaker writes as one restored to time’s fullness. In this hour—the queen’s hour—she enjoys an exact imagination of the translucent beauty of this-worldliness. Most crucially, the speaker’s return to time restores her access to memory. Having undergone and survived the trial of falling out of time recorded in A 829, the speaker now recognizes time as her ally and love’s witness. In writing to the “Master”, she alludes at every opportunity to their place on the plane of human experience and to love’s progress in the ebb and flow of human temporality. In retracing the passage of her love for him/It from its origins to the present, she recalls the moment in the now-distant past when her heart “outgrew me –” (16) and became too heavy to hold; she remembers the moment when she first heard of and asked the “Master” for “Redemption” and the next when he/It “gave me something / else” (23–24) that made her forget

redemption; she remembers the moment of conversion, the turning in the heart—“I knew you had altered me –” (27)—and how long it was before she was able to tell the “Master” of the change; and she remembers a time when she would have thrown away her life—“my breath” (30)—had that been the price exacted to remain in the presence of the strange thing he/It had given her.



Fig. 32. A 828, ca. summer–autumn 1861, line 27

It is not only time but also an awareness of time’s passing that spurs the speaker forward with new frankness. Immediately following repeated injunctions to the “Master” to “remember” all the points along the itinerary of their love, she notes “I am older – tonight” (33), and a little later, she remarks that she has been waiting “a long time” (104) for their reunion. And then, suddenly, A 828 projects Dickinson’s speaker and her addressee far into the future. After taking inventory of the marks on their corporeal bodies that appear to affirm their subjection to aging and mortality—her hazel hair dappled; “Master” carrying a cane—on the penultimate leaf of text, she imagines consulting her watch to see how far the “Day” has “declined” and if they might “take the chances of ↑for↓ Heaven –” (111). In this future that approaches, they stand in the last province of the light to watch the dimming of the world. The sun is already far down in the west; the blue hills of A 827 are darkening into slate gray; the whole Connecticut River Valley is falling into shadow lit only by the bobolink’s—that New World’s blackbird’s—“silver scruple” (95). In all ways, A 828 is a night composition; it calibrates the dark, takes its measure. Although devotion itself is as changeless as “the moon and the / crescent –” (35–36), the writer and addressee living under the sky in the Northern Hemisphere are themselves vulnerable to change.

Dickinson is in her thirty-first year on earth, and although but three years have passed since her composition of the first extant missive and this one, the distance between A 827 and A 828 is the infinite distance between *then* and *now*. Through A 828’s rhythmic variation of temporal zones—human, deep historical, cosmic—speaker-writer and addressee alternately seem to collide and spin light years

away from each other. This zooming in and out of time reverberates in the text's changes of scale: love stakes its claims in Pompeii and the House of Plantagenet, in an hour in a meadow near Amherst, in the bobolink's vespers.

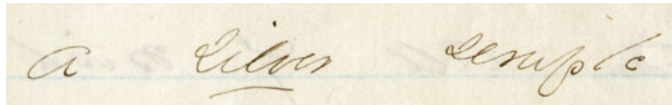


Fig. 33. A 828, ca. summer–autumn 1861, line 95 (detail)

The dialectics of memory and forgetting that form the temporal axis of A 828 are echoed in the dialectics of nearness and distance that play out on the spatial plane of the document. The speaker wishes to “breathe where you breathed – / and find the place – myself –” (38–39); she grieves that “sorrow and frost” (42) are nearer the “Master” than she is; she desires to “come nearer” to him/It “than Presbyteries – and nearer than / the new coat – that the Tailor / made –” (48–51); she acknowledges that endless separation is the condition for their exchange: “the prank of the Heart / at play on the Heart – in holy / Holiday – is forbidden me –” (51–53). Whereas in A 827, the voice of the “Master” surprises the speaker after a period of silence, interior allusions in A 828 suggest that more recent messages, now lost, if they ever really existed beyond the speaker’s imagination, were exchanged and that they led her far outside the boundaries of convention asserted in A 827. Now in the speaker’s telling, his/Its voice returns merely as a citation in her text, a mark of his/Its presence-absence, while the many dashes that rend the text may be spaces made by the exit of the “Master” or spaces of memory itself.

Those who cannot speak directly to one another must fashion a new language in which to communicate, a set of signs known only to them or sometimes only to one of them. Some of the allusions in A 828 feel private, opaque. What is the “Corporation” that trespasses “Eternity” (99)? What is “the little chest – to / put the alive – in” (114–15)? Such references ensure that the understanding of outsiders remains partial and imperfect. They may point to the long, now untraceable chain of communications between the supposed structures of writer and addressee or only to the indecipherability at the heart of private histories and the gaps inherent in all messages sent across time and space. The presence of the “Master” solely as a citation in the

speaker’s text conversely reminds us of his absence and of the “address gap” between them. It is not only that such references ensure that the understanding of outsiders, *our* understanding, remains partial, but they also remind us of the correspondents’ estrangement from each other. In A 828, Dickinson shows us that devotion and writing are exorbitant and asymmetrical and that both may be a summons to a releasing violence that is also a hidden plenitude.

The textual situation of A 828 is unique in relation to the other “Master” documents. Editors have generally labeled all three “Master” documents once deemed “letters” as “drafts” because they remained among Dickinson’s papers and in unfinished states. But they are not all drafts in the same sense. The first extant document, A 827, begins as a fair copy and becomes an intermediate copy only after Dickinson decides to revise a line close to the end of the text and is unable to do so without crossing out three words and interlineating variants. Even here, however, the variants appear in virtually the same fair hand as the words they replace, and the evenness of the ink strokes and color indicate that the changes were made in the course of writing or very soon after, possibly when she scanned the page and found a line that did not please. The second extant epistolary document, A 829, a document better defined as of indeterminate genre, is an early trial, a preliminary draft composed in pencil in a hand intended for deciphering by Dickinson alone. Here again, though, the greatest number of changes, many of which she left unresolved, were introduced in the flow of drafting, and the remainder, made later with a sharper pencil, still appear to have been introduced in the same setting.

By contrast, the composition of A 828 almost certainly unfolds in two distinct moments separated by an indefinite interval. In the first moment of textual creation, Dickinson composed in ink, writing across two folded sheets, or four leaves of stationery, leaving only the verso of the final leaf blank. She has written quite fluidly from beginning to end, the hallmark of fair copies transcribed from an exemplar, save for a hesitation of perhaps a few seconds on the verso of the second leaf when she crossed out a single word and, further down on the same leaf, carefully interlineated two others. In the second moment

of composition, Dickinson changes writing implements, working now with pencil rather than pen. Dickinson's turning from ink to the pencil's lead marks a fundamental change in the document's status from a potentially public to a private one: although the salutation remains, her pencil, or the mixture of ink and lead, seems to signal that A 828 will not enter the circuit of exchange. In this second moment of textual composition, A 828 is re-directed inward. And yet it is as sure as—surer than—anything in ink. The shift in the speaker-writer's psychic equilibrium surfaces in the deliberateness of Dickinson's cancellations and the power of her additions. Together, they catalyze her escape from the conditions of the earlier version of A 828 as well as those of the still earlier trial of A 829.

In the manuscript witness, the pencil strikes through inked words, allowing the two layers of the text to appear in clear relief. The longest single passage canceled by Dickinson in her second approach to the text follows:

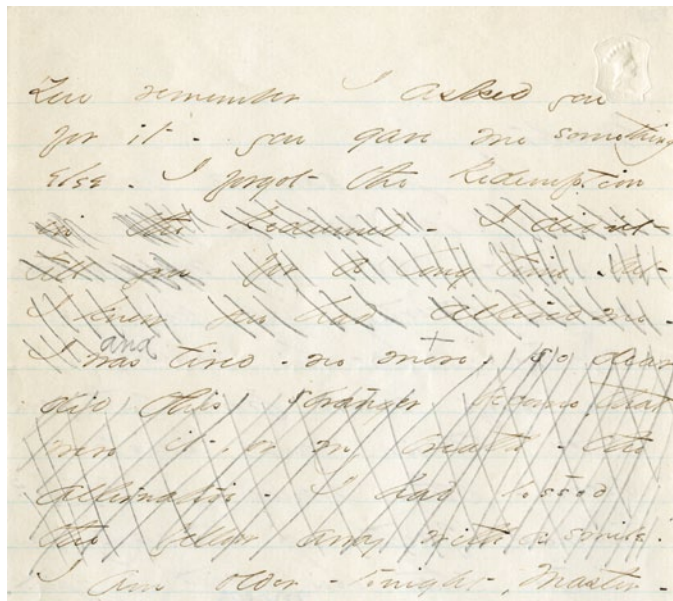


Fig. 34. A 828, ca. summer–autumn 1861, lines 22–33

And another passage appearing later in the text:

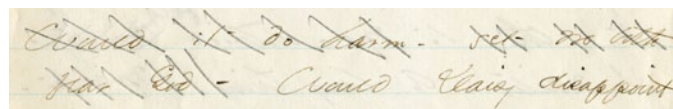


Fig. 35. A 828, ca. summer–autumn 1861, lines 125–26

And a third cancellation of what was once—in another world—the final line of the first version of the text:



Fig. 36. A 828, ca. summer–autumn, 1861, line 136

Dickinson's Webster's defines *abject* as "A state of being cast away, hence a low state; meanness of spirit; baseness". In the first version of A 828 and, still more violently, in the trial of A 829, abjection draws Dickinson, in the philosopher Julia Kristeva's words, "toward the place where meaning collapses".¹⁹⁰ Yet while in moving from A 829 to A 828, Dickinson first carries over the earlier epistolary work's abject elements, in her second passage through A 828, she crosses them out. The strikethroughs she makes during her return to the text are extensive and heavy. Intentionality, so often ambiguous in Dickinson's manuscripts, is in this instance clear. Here the act of cancellation opens up the route to autopoiesis and a new account in which the writer's experience of abjection and loss is replaced by her sudden apprehension of the overwhelming plenitude of each moment. Sometime in late 1860, Dickinson had read these lines of Emerson: "The poet knows that he speaks adequately then only when he speaks somewhat wildly, or with 'the flower of the mind'; not with the intellect used as an organ, but with the intellect released from all service and suffered to take its direction from its celestial life".¹⁹¹ Outside—beyond—abjection, the second version of A 828 touches—sounds—a beauty and serenity we will not find again until we reach Dickinson's late writings of the 1870s and 1880s, when it is at last permitted full voice.¹⁹²

190 And how strangely resonant Kristeva's description of the "abject" is for our reading of these texts: "A certain 'ego' that merged with its *master* [emphasis added], a superego, has flatly driven [the abject] away. It lies outside, beyond the set, and does not seem to agree to the latter's rules of the game. And yet, from its place of banishment, the abject does not cease challenging the *master* [emphasis added]. Without a sign (for him), it beseeches a discharge, a convulsion, a crying out. To each ego its object; to each superego its abject. It is not the white expanse or slack boredom of repression, not the translations and transformations of desire that wrench bodies, nights, and discourse; rather it is a brutish suffering that 'I' puts up with, sublime and devastated, for 'I' deposits it to the father's account [verse au *pere-pere-uresion*]: I endure it, for I imagine that such is the desire of the other"; see Kristeva's *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*, trans. Leon S. Roudiez (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982), p. 2.

191 See R. W. Emerson's "The Poet" in *Essays: Second Series* (Boston: James Munroe, 1844).

192 Here again we might probe the influence of the "Master" experiment on Dickinson's later—late—work, where prose and verse often alternate within a single document and where there is a similar fanning out of address.

In the second version of A 828, moreover, ending opens unto ending and at last to unendingness. First, it is possible that in canceling her petition to “Master” to answer—“Will you tell me if you will?” (136)—Dickinson is choosing to close the text with the lines just above, those carrying the vision of “the true [who] keep / coming – till the town is full” (134–35).¹⁹³

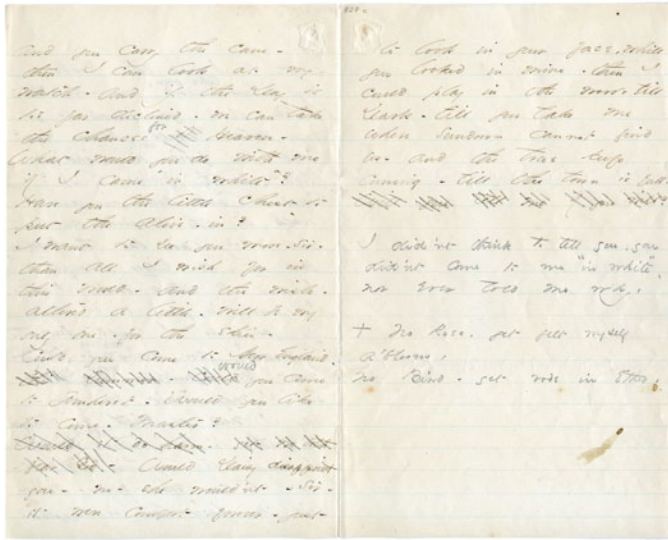


Fig. 37. A 828, ca. summer–autumn 1861, cancels as boundary lines

Yet below the new boundary line created by cancels, Dickinson set down two passages, both penciled in a fair copy hand. Each is just three lines long: the first is apparently prose, the last is certainly verse:

*I did't think to tell you, you
did't come to me “in white” –
nor ever told me why – (137–39)*

*+ No Rose, yet felt myself
a'bloom,
No Bird – yet rode in Ether – (140–42; rev ? 28–30)*

What are these passages that glide below the body of the text proper, and where do they belong? In a poetics of the text, we might see them principally as additions, unmarked and marked, respectively, for incorporation into the work's

body. Indeed, given the semantic echoes of the prose passage with lines almost opposite it on the unfolded sheet—“What would you do with *me* [emphasis added] / if I came ‘in white’ –” (112–13)—it seems likely that even though there is no material indication that the penciled lines should appear in proximity to the lines they answer, Dickinson nonetheless intended to stitch them back into the text at that point.

In the case of the second set of lines, the lines in verse, the unusually magnified diacritical “+” to the left of “No Rose” clearly recalls the reader to a passage all the way back on the verso of the document's opening leaf, a passage itself most aggressively re-called—literally struck out—by Dickinson in her second transit through the text. In the forest of cancel lines—three lines of heavy diagonal cancels and four lines of crosshatched cancels—a few words are spared: “I forgot the Redemption / ↑and↓ was tired – no more ↑+↓” (24, 28). And out of these surviving words arises the spare tercet, physically at lines 140–42, revised as lines 28–30: “+ No Rose, yet felt myself / a'bloom, / No Bird – yet rode in Ether –”. Here conjured by the echoing “+” floating above the word “more”—for they are nowhere inscribed on the verso of the first leaf—the verse lines function as a *punctum* in the text, reversing its and the writer's course ever deeper into abjection and re-directing her far outside the coordinates—dialectics—of mastery.

Yet unlike a poetics of the text, a poetics of writing, while gladly acknowledging that the tercet turns the text on the verso of its opening leaf, also reads the tercet as the epigraph or coda manually inscribed at the document's very close and as performing its re-opening. For even if the text concludes just before the final canceled boundary line, the compositional process did not. In Dickinson's essentially graphetically bound, written poetics, the conventional relation signaled by Dickinson's cross (+) is not canceled but destabilized, and here we have a compelling—and fundamentally Dickinsonian—example of the parting of identity between “text” and “writing”. The last words Dickinson wrote, the last thought she had in this scene of writing, not only perform her escape from the net of single address—the correspondence with the “Master”, whether actual or imagined, is over—but also signal her flight into the poetics of “choosing not choosing” that marks much of her verse at

193 Readers will notice—hear—the echo of these lines with those closing A 827: “tell me, please to tell / me, soon as you are / well”.

least between 1861 and 1864 and, in different ways, all her post-1864 letters, prose, and verse fragments.

Beginning with a powerful conceit of the shot bird who continues to sing, A 828 climaxes or ends, depending on our placement of a textual addition, with the bird's (speaker's) escape from gravity and ascension into ether.¹⁹⁴ Either way, the transit, expressed in the melody of A 828, is that of the stranger progress of negativity: on the way to the "untried ~~country~~ ↑fold↓" (103), the speaker is suddenly raptured, but in place of the eschatological instant of salvation she once—perhaps now long ago—desired, comes a poetry interchangeable with grace. And so, the text of A 828 that first records the speaker's re-entry into time and the re-ordering of her experience of the shattered world described in A 829 also marks her subsequent exit into an atopic paradise of words outside the labor of writing. "No Bird" is not constative—it neither states nor reports a truth in the world, and it is not subject to error—but performative. In A 828, poetry moves away from language into music. Code words for visible and invisible beauty, respectively, "Rose" and "No Bird" also express the writer's singular sounding of the re-astonishment of the world.

194 Although I do not wish to impose a biblical reading of A 828 (or any of the "Master" documents) here, Dickinson surely knew the following passage from *The Wisdom of Solomon* 5.11: "Or as when a bird hath flown through the air, there is no token of her way to be found, but the light air being beaten with the stroke of her wings and parted with the violent noise and motion of them, is passed through, and therein afterwards no sign where she went is to be found" (KJV). For her deep familiarity with this source, see Jack L. Capps, "The King James Version", in *Emily Dickinson's Reading: 1836–1886* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1966), chap. 2.

DĀI-SI-ED, *a.* [See *Daisy.*] Full of daisies ; adorned with daisies. *Shak.*

DĀI-SY, *n.* *s* as *z.* [Sax. *dæges-ege*, day's eye.]
A plant of the genus *Bellis*, of several varieties. The blue daisy belongs to the genus *Globularia*, as does the globe daisy ; the greater or ox-eye daisy belongs to the genus *Chrysanthemum* ; and the middle daisy, to the *Doronicum*.
Fam. of Plants.

Fig. 38. *Daisy* defined in Noah Webster's *American Dictionary of the English Language*, 1844

APPENDIX 1

Fascicled “Master” Poems

Poems referencing a “Master” figure appear in Fascicles 3, 15, 19, 32 and 34.

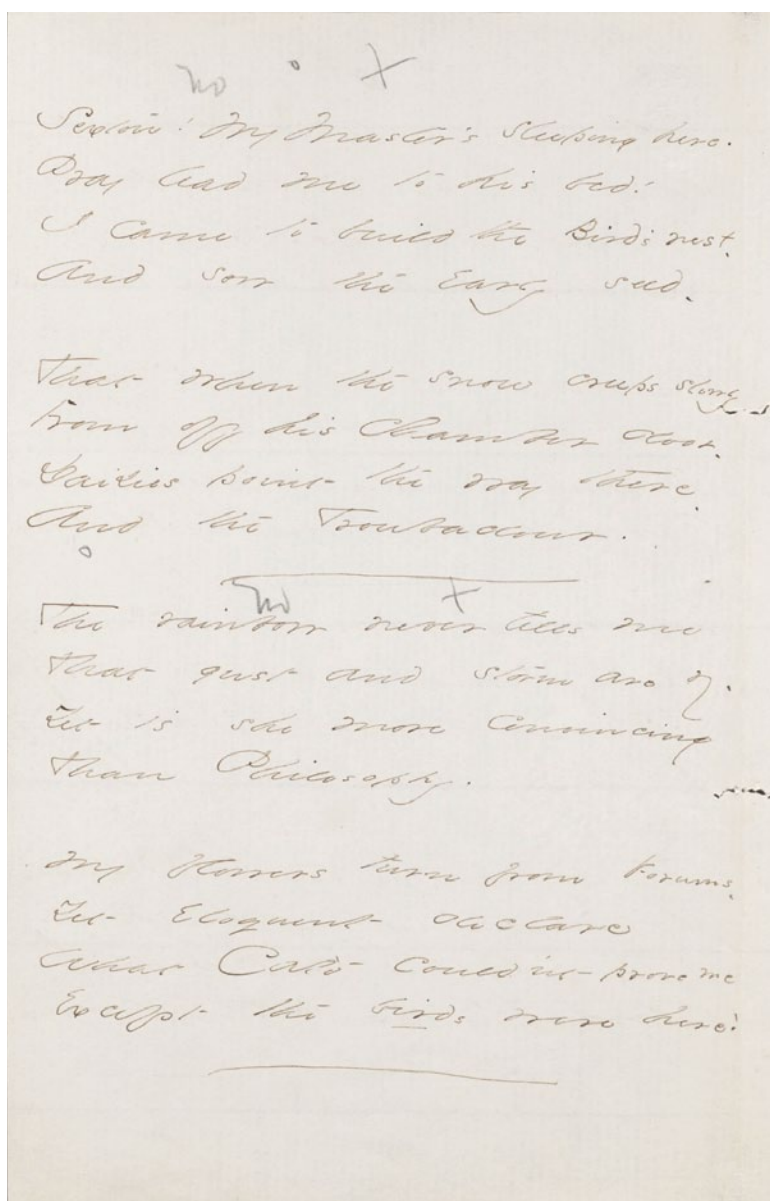


Figure A1.1

Sexton! My Master's sleeping here.

H 2, ca. spring 1859, Fascicle 3

The following poems share the sheet H 2:

Angels, in the early morning

My nosegays are for Captives –

Sexton! My Master's sleeping here.

The rainbow never tells me

One dignity delays for all –

As by the dead we love to sit,

New feet within my garden go –

I hide myself within my flower

Sunset at Night - is natural.
 But Sunset on the Earth
 Reverses Nature's March.
 So Midnight's - day - at - Dawn.

 Eclipses - predicted -
 And Science tells them in -
 But do they face us
 suddenly.
 Jehovah's Watch - is doing.

Sunset at Night - is natural -

H 172, ca. autumn 1862, Fascicle 15

The following poems share the sheet H 172:

'Twas like a Maelstrom, with / a notch,

I gave myself to Him -

Sunset at Night - is natural -

Figure A1.2

80-7
 The face I carry with
 me - Coat -
 When I go out of town -
 To take my Rank - by - in
 the West -
 That face - will just be thin -
 My hand it is the Angel -
 That - Sir - was my Ulysses -
 In Kingdoms - you have heard
 the Rascal -
 Roper is - Rascally -
 Will take it - scan it - stop
 aside -
 Return with such a Crown
 As Gabriel - was Caped at -
 And beg me put - it on -
 And when - will turn me round
 and round -
 To an admiring Sky -
 As one that was her Master's name -
 Sufficient Royalty

The face I carry with / me – last –

A 80-7, ca. autumn 1862, Fascicle 19

This poem is inscribed on a single leaf on which no other poems appear. It is the final leaf of the fascicle.

Figure A1.3

X no

A Wife - at Daybreak -
 I had to -
 Sunrise - Hear thou a
 ♪ Can you see?
 At Midnight - I am
 set a Maid -
 When shall it take
 make it Pious -
 Then - Midnight - I have
 passed from thee -
 Unto the East - and Victory
 Midnight - Good night -
 I hear them Call -
 The Angels wait in the Hall -
 Softly - My Future Climbs the
 Stair -
 I faint at my Child's Prayers -
 So soon to be a Child - no more
 to weep - I'm coming Sir -
 Martin - I'll see the Face -

A Wife - at Daybreak -

H 219, ca. second half of 1863, Fascicle 32

The following poems share the sheet H 219:

A Wife - at Daybreak -

Why make it doubt - it / hurts it so -

I live with Him - I see / His face -

The power to be true to You,

Figure A1.4

Why make it doubt - it
 hurts it so -
 So sick - to guess -
 So strong - to know -
 So true - Open it's little
 Bed
 To tell the very last they
 said
 Unto steady - and smile -
 And shake -
 For that dear - distant -
 Dangerous - sake -
 But - the Instead -
 the Pinching fear
 That something - it did
 Do - or dare -
 Off and the Vision - and
 it flew -
 And they no more remember -
 Nor you turn to let me why -
 Oh - Master - this is why -

Figure A1.5

Why make it doubt - it / hurts it so -

H 219, ca. second half of 1863, Fascicle 32

The following poems share the sheet H 219:

A Wife - at Daybreak -

Why make it doubt - it / hurts it so -

I live with Him - I see / His face -

The power to be true to You,

OPPOSITE

My Life had stood - a / Loaded Gun -

H 131, ca. late 1863, Fascicle 34

The following poems share the sheet H 131:

My Life had stood - a / Loaded Gun -

The Sunrise runs for Both -

No Bobolink - reverse / His Singing

With
 My life had stood - a
 loaded Gun.
 In Canons - till a day
 The Gunner passed - identified -
 And carried the array -
 And now we roam + in
 Sovereign Woods -
 And now we hunt the Deer.
 And every time I speak
 for Him
 The Mountains straight + stay.
 And so I smile, such
 Cordial light
 Open the Valley glow -
 It is as a Vesuvian face
 Had let its pleasure through.
 And when at Night - Our
 Good Day done -

Figure A1.6

I guard My Master's Head -
 'Tis better than the Tiger -
 such;
 + deep Plover - to have shared -
 To for of His - I'm dead,
 for -
 From + still the second time -
 On whom I lay, a silver
 eye.
 Or An emphatic Thumbs -
 Though I than He - may
 longer live
 He longer must - than I.
 For I have not the power
 to Kill,
 Without - the Power to Die -
 + the - + Cor + harm + art

Figure A1.7

APPENDIX 2

A 826, Second Variant Version

116
 FP ✓

A Wife - at Daybreak
 I shall be -
 Sunrise - hasten thou
 a Flag for me?
 At Midnight - I am
 but a Maid,
 How short it takes to
 make it Bride -
 Then - Midnight - I have
 passed from the
 West to the East, and
 Victory -

Midnight - Good night!
 I hear them call.

In addition to the fascicle version of *A Wife – at Daybreak* – (see Appendix 1), a second variant version of the poem (A 116) was also found among Dickinson's unbound poems. It is composed in ink in a fair hand on a sheet of stationery. The document has not been folded or otherwise prepared for sending.

A Wife – at Daybreak

A 116, ca. summer 1862

Figure A2.1

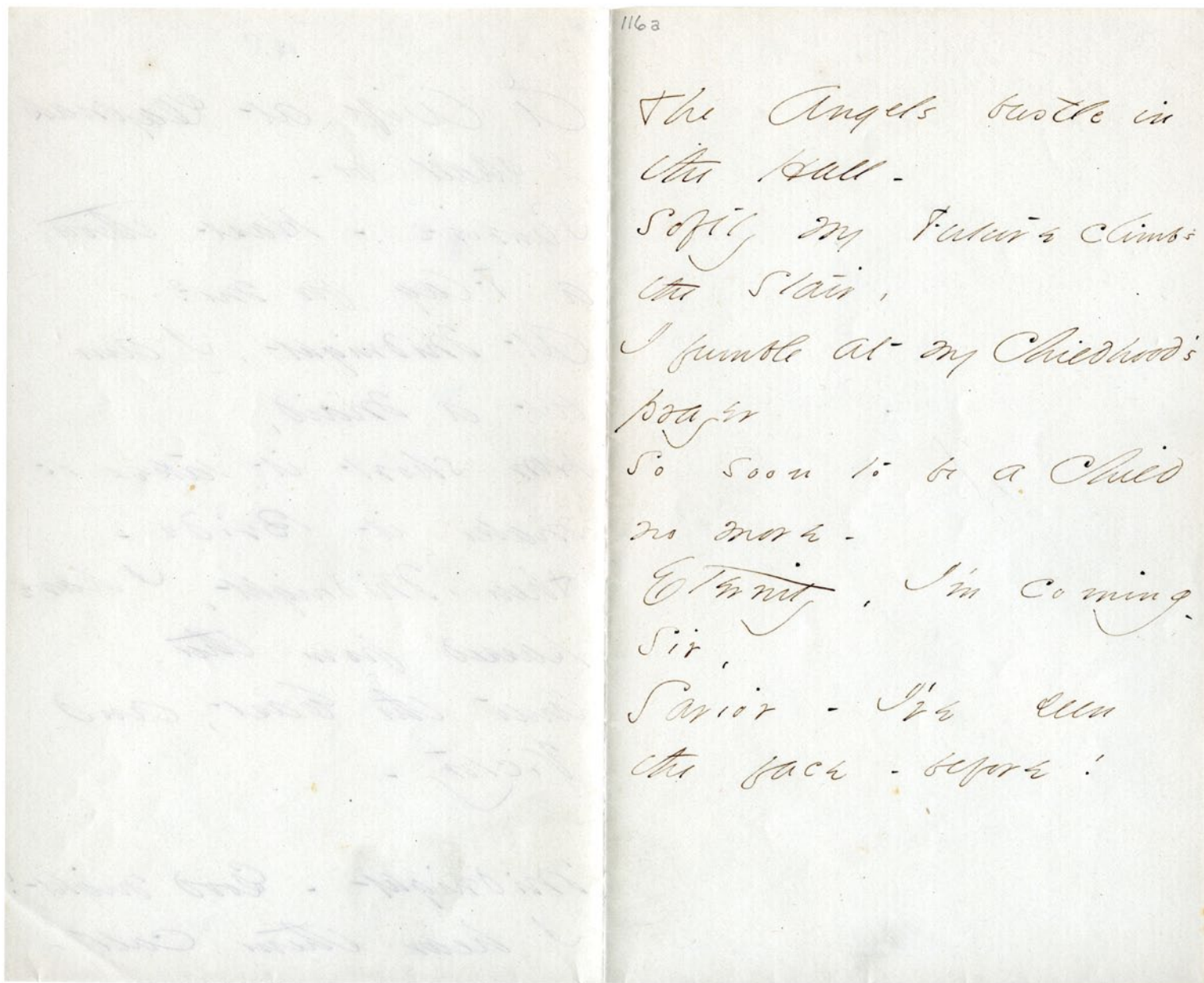


Figure A2.2

APPENDIX 3

Additional Candidates for the “Master” Constellation, 1858–1861

The textual boundaries of the “Master” experiment are not easy to draw. Although I ultimately chose to include only two additional documents in this edition—*Mute – thy Coronation* – (A 825) and *A wife – at Daybreak* (A 826)—two others were strong contenders: *Did the Harebell loose / her girdle* (A 167) and *Again – his voice is at / the door* – (A 89-8/9). Excluded here because they offer no direct address to the “Master” and, furthermore, because their transmission histories differ from those of the other “Master” documents included in the present constellation, they nonetheless share two important conditions with the others: neither was ever bound into a fascicle, and neither, so far as we know, circulated beyond Dickinson’s private archive.

Did the Harebell loose / her girdle (A 167) dates to the same period as *Mute – thy Coronation* – (A 825), that is, ca. second half of 1860. It is a fair copy in pencil on a leaf of cream, lightly ruled stationery embossed FINE | NOTE | PAPER in a medallion. It has been folded into thirds, perhaps, since it remains unaddressed, for added privacy.

Again – his voice is at / the door – (A 89-8/9) dates to ca. early 1862 and thus the far end of the first constellation of “Master” documents. It is a fair copy in ink, with numerous variants, on a sheet of wove, cream stationery embossed PARIS. It has not been folded.

Although I did not include A 89-8/9 here—to do so would have required a transgression of the editorial parameters I set for the present constellation—it is my conviction that the poem looks back on the “Master” documents 1858–1861 from a half a year’s distance and serves, perhaps, as a kind of hinge between the unbound “Master” documents of this period and the fascicled “Master” documents of late 1862 and 1863. The vocabulary alone—*flowers, moon, Angels, drops, stain*—is suggestive. The rash of underlinings—twenty-eight instances in forty-six physical lines—and high number of variants further endow the work with an intensity characteristic of that in A 829 and A 828. An outlier in this edition, *Again – his voice is at / the door* – beautifully troubles the boundaries I have imagined.

167

Did the Harebell loose
 her girdle
 to the Cover Bee
 would the Bee the Harebell
 follow
 much as formerly?

Did the "Paradise" - preserved -
 feed her meat of pearl
 would the Eden be an Eden
 Or the East - an East?

Figure A3.1. A 167, ca. second half of 1860, Did the Harebell loose / her girdle

69-8
 PARIS

Again - his voice is at
 the door -
 I feel the old Ungau -
 I hear him ask the
 servant -
 For such an ou-ou-ou -
 I take a
flour - as I go -
 My face is scuffing -
 He never can see in
 this light - not please
 I might embrace his
 eye:
 I cross the hall
 with mingled steps -

Figure A3.2. A 89-8, ca. early 1862, Again - his voice is at / the door -, opening leaf

I. silent - pass the ^{speechless} door.
 I look on all this
 world curtains -
 Just his face. nothing
 more!
 We talk in
^{venture} Carles. and in Toss.
 A kind of plummet-
 strain. ^{shyly}
 Each. bounding. shif.
 Just - how - deep.
 The others ^{first had been} one - had been.
 We walk. I
 can my leg. ^{behind} at home.
 89-9
 A tender. throughout
Moon
 Goes with us. just
 a little way.
 And then - we are
Alone.
Alone - if Angels
 are Alone.
 First time they try the
step!
Alone - if those railed
faces ^{that} st ^{murmur} so - char-
We cannot - Count - par -
On Right!
 I'd give - 1: in that
hour - again -

Figure A3.3. A 89-9, ca. early 1862, Again - his voice is at / the door -, final leaves

Afterword

Interpretation in a New Key

JEROME MCGANN

It is a rare thing for a scholar to disorder the senses of received criticism and interpretive method, which is the great achievement of Marta Werner's book. Rare because when critical interpreters seek to discover the truth about the works we investigate, our regular tools—essays and books—tempt us to deliver finished forms. *Writing in Time: Emily Dickinson's Master Hours* is different. As learned, thorough, and meticulous as any work of scholarship I have ever read, it "reconceives the editorial enterprise as a critical meditation and devotional exercise".

It adopts that form of address because virtually everything about the history and significance of these documents, not least of all the documentary set itself, turns finally to "a matter of some conjecture". So when *Writing in Time* issues its call to reimagine our scholarly responsibilities, its reasons are as implacable and unnerving as the documents that focus Werner's amazing acts of attention:

[T]hese documents that may or may not be letters; these documents that may or may not have been addressed to someone in particular; these documents that were belatedly intercepted and opened by us; these documents that, though they seem to allow the dead to speak to the living again, at last present beautiful and overwhelming obstacles for decoding.

Briefly, "at their most fundamental, ontological level, we don't know what they are". What do they signify, what is their number? To investigate them is to undertake a search with "no single trajectory" and "no certain end". The documents are radically paradoxical, at once completely objective and thoroughly volatile. Under those conditions, "[o]ne reading may not cancel another" because all readings are compelled to operate within the exacting space of objective, philological truth: "the knowledge of what is and has been known".¹⁹⁵ Consequently, three simple and straightforward requirements rule this study space: to be thorough, to be accurate, to be candid. Just because those are impossible demands does not make them any less imperative. If you don't submit, as Werner has, you're either not really being serious, or you're taking yourself too seriously. But if you accept those rules, a world will lie all before you, where to choose.

Having made for itself a picture of great detail, Werner's little book has run an errand into the wilderness, or wonderland, of Emily Dickinson's work. From its deep map of experience, emotion, and memory, one might land anywhere and find an opening of a field. Given how much

195 "Die Erkenntnis des Erkannten", August Boeckh's formulation of the project of philology: see *Enzyklopädie und Methodologie der gesamten philologischen Wissenschaften*, ed. Ernst Bratuschek (Leipzig: B. G. Teubner, 1877), p. 11.

Dickinson made of what the “lips” of the dawn and the dusk have to say—and not just in the first of the “Master Letters”—how much are we to make of that key flower, the daisy? For that matter, why “Daisy”, and how far should we track that name, that word, beyond the spaces that Werner has chosen to examine? Like the immensely self-aware writer that Dickinson was, the daisy is in fact two flowers in one. Is it relevant to recall that Daisy is “Day’s Eye”, with an outer floret closing over the inner at dusk and then opening out again at dawn?

Uncertainty marks any given passage in these “Master” documents: “Oh ' did I offend it – / ~~Did'nt it want to me / to tell it the truth,~~ / Daisy – Daisy – offend it?” That strange pronoun *it* haunts so much of her writing, and in this document—the second “Letter”—*it* shifts radically. The letter opens by abruptly addressing “Master” twice as “it”. By its third appearance, that abject pronoun has turned slightly ambiguous, and when it comes again—in paragraph three—*it* is no longer either “Master” or ambiguous; *it* has become “Daisy”. Or consider this passage from the third “Letter”:

*I heard of a
thing called “Redemption” – which
rested men and women –
You remember I asked you
for it – you gave me something
else – I forgot the Redemption
in the Redeemed – I did'nt
tell you – for a long time – but
I knew – you had altered me –
and +
I was tired – no more – so dear
did this stranger become, that
were it, or my breath – the
alternative – I had tossed
the fellow away with a smile.*

What was that “something else”—“this stranger”—that took the place of “Redemption”? Poetry, love, “*something else*” (emphasis added)? Or what is the referent of “it” in the phrase “were it, or my breath”? Choosing makes a difference, so does not choosing, and we are drawn to both. Or what is the syntax of “– no more”? Choosing makes a difference, as does not choosing, and we are drawn to both.

So Dickinson’s “Master” materials are writings where “a something overtakes the mind” at every turn, and Werner’s scholarship helps that to happen for us.¹⁹⁶ We know that during some uncertain months and years between perhaps the spring of 1858 and mid- or late 1861 (or even early 1862), Dickinson entered the first seriously deliberate phase of her writing life. The period of Werner’s *Writing in Time* looks back to the previous years, especially 1853 to 1857, when Dickinson began testing her vocation, and forward to the moment in April 1862 when she deepened the test by writing to Thomas Wentworth Higginson to ask that public man of letters “if my Verse is alive” (15 April 1862; L 260). As her self-conscious and often ironical correspondence with Higginson shows, it was not a question that reflected her doubt of herself but her doubt of him and of the official culture he represented. “You say”, she wrote to him, that her writing seemed “Beyond your knowledge”. But she then coyly asked, “You would not jest with me, because I believe you – but – Preceptor – you cannot mean it? All men say ‘What’ to me, but I thought it a fashion –” (August 1862; L 271).

Dickinson told Higginson that “I made no verse – but one or two – until this winter” (25 April 1862; L 261). For whatever reason—and in whatever inflection—she was lying. All men seem to have been saying “What” to her work for some time. Indeed, Dickinson had been making a great deal of verse during the years and hours of 1853 to 1857 when she began fashioning herself as her own verse Master. These were the years when she tested her work with an intimate circle of friends—principally her brother Austin and sister Lavinia, her cousins Louise and Frances Norcross, Josiah and Elizabeth Holland, and especially Susan Gilbert and Henry Emmons. As early as the spring of 1853, Dickinson was sending and receiving verse and prose with Emmons, a young man actively involved in promoting literary work in Amherst during his undergraduate years at the college. Their exchanges continued through his graduation in 1854, at which point Sue became the principal person Dickinson chose to test out her work.

196 “Did you ever read one of her Poems backward, because the plunge from the front overturned you? I sometimes (often have, many times) have – A something overtakes the Mind”: Dickinson’s note on a piece of wrapping paper; see Thomas H. Johnson with Theodora Ward, eds., *The Letters of Emily Dickinson*, 3 vols. (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1958), III (hereafter cited as *Letters*).

R. W. Franklin's standard edition records only two poems by Dickinson written in the years 1853 to 1857—one in 1853, a second in 1854—but the exchanges with Emmons alone show that more, probably many more, were being written in those years.¹⁹⁷

In that context, *Writing in Time* helps us see what must have been happening in those otherwise obscured years and hours. When Werner reminds us that Dickinson likely destroyed the drafts of nearly all of her early verse, we realize that many of the fair copies Dickinson began assembling into the fascicles between 1858 and 1859 must have been taken from verse drafted or composed at different times during 1853 to 1857. The fascicles are thus Dickinson's private declaration that she had been making herself her own Master since 1853 and that the "Master" documents, which she kept to herself, are primarily about herself and her "wish – altered a little – [...] for the skies" (A 828).

But what exactly does that wish entail? One can't emphasize too strongly how provokingly enigmatic the "Master Letters" are, how riven with contradictions. I've already pointed out the game she plays in the second "Master Letter" with that magic word *it*, and the third "Letter" has that idiosyncratic use of *be* that we also find in her verse ("Master – I didn't be – myself"). In all three letters, Master is far from masterful and Daisy far from simply plaintive. Both are sick, they puzzle each other, Daisy seeks and gives instruction. Thinking of a world elsewhere toward the end of the third "Letter", Daisy supposes that they might "take the chances of for Heaven" and immediately asks, "What would you do with me if I came 'in white'?" She leaves the question hanging, but when the letter closes, we recognize that bewildered longing pervades the scene: "I didn't think to tell you, you didn't come to me 'in white' – nor ever told me why –". What does it mean, then, to come "in white", when the traditional trope for Rapture has been so remediated (transubstantiated)?

Dickinson's letters to Emmons in the spring of 1853 are particularly notable, underscoring as they do how their exchanges were being marked in floral code:

*Since receiving your beautiful writing I have often
desired to thank you thro' a few of my flowers, and
arranged the fairest for you a little while ago, but heard
you were away –*

*I have very few today, and they compare but slightly
with the immortal blossoms you kindly gathered me, but
will you please accept them – the "Lily of the field" for the
blossoms of Paradise, and if 'tis ever mine to gather those
which fade not, from the garden we have not seen, you shall
have a brighter one than I can find today. (L 119)*

This is clearly a gesture of playful modesty, apologizing for the unworthiness of her verses in the language of the New Testament. She is still using this code and sending him "flowers" in January and May 1854 (L 151, L 163). So when we turn to the verse that Franklin dates to 1858 to 1859, one can hardly doubt that some of those poems were actually written much earlier. Many deploy floral coding, like "When Roses cease to bloom, Sir" (Fr 8). Was this perhaps one of the poems she sent to Emmons? Or perhaps "It's all I have to bring today –" (Fr 17) (Fig. A)? We don't know, but we do know that the natural world of fields and flowers, birds and bees, is supplying Dickinson with a figurative language for a transmortal poetry.

Most of the poetry in Fascicle 1 uses that language. Sometimes Dickinson makes the connection all but explicit between her poetic "pageantry" and outdoor seasonal action, as in "All these my banners be." (Fr 29) (Fig. B). Projected into that imaginative horizon as her first person, Dickinson even becomes the anemone (Fr 7), the rose (Fr 10, Fr 25), the gentian (Fr 21, Fr 26), and, of course, Daisy. The identification between natural, religious, and poetical worlds is complete in "There is a morn by men unseen –" (Fr 13), where Dickinson runs another familiar code through her coded landscape,

*Here to light measure, move the feet
Which walk no more the village street –
Nor by the wood are found –*¹⁹⁸

197 See R. W. Franklin, ed., *The Poems of Emily Dickinson: Variorum Edition*, 3 vols. (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1998), l. 57–60 (Fr 3 and Fr 4). Operating a slightly different editorial approach, Thomas Johnson assigns five poems to the years 1850 to 1854 (*The Poems of Emily Dickinson*, 3 vols. [Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1955], l. 1–9, J 1–5); see also *Letters* l. 246–47, 280, 294–95.

198 See also Fr 15, Fr 16, and perhaps Fr 11.

Whose banners are the Angels -
 Whose banners are the skies -
 My banners are their faces -
 My faith that leads across
 Much from its own alloy
 Such illumination hours.

It's all I have to bring today -
 This, and my heart beside -
 This, and my heart, and all the gifts
 And all the creations made -
 Be sure you count: that I forgot
 Some one this Sun could tell -
 This, and my heart, and all the gifts
 Which in the cover dwell.

Fig. A. A 82-5v (Fr 17), ca. 1858, "It's all I have to bring today -"

All these my banners be.
 I saw my banners
 In May -
 It was a train of train -
 Then kept in state again -
 My banner. All the plain
 Today.

To lose - if one can find again -
 To miss - if one shall meet -
 The Burden cannot rest -
 The Broker cannot cheat -
 To build the hills of gold
 Then little spears of mine
 Leaving words for Blair
 And for Columbus -
 You and I the secret
 Of the Circus know -
 Let us chant it softly.
 "There is no more snow!"

To him who keeps an Orlean's heart
 The Strangers are kind to him.

Fig. B. A 82-2v (Fr 29), "All these my banners be."

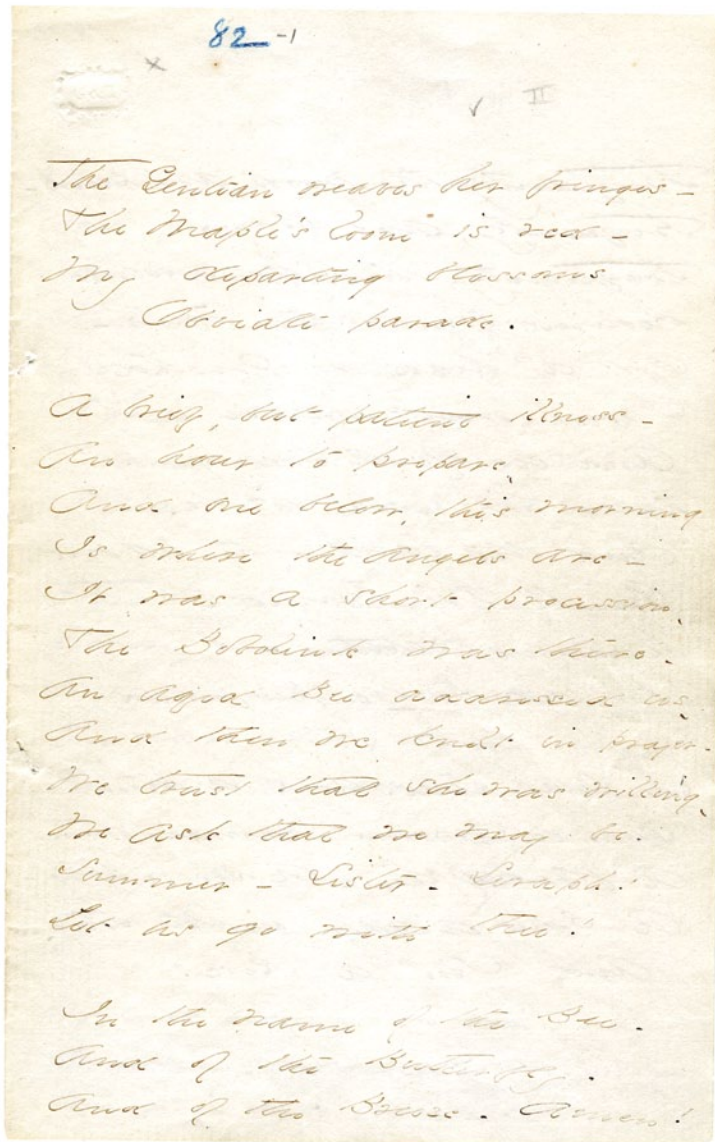


Fig. C. A 82-1 (Fr 21–23; J 18), “The Gentian weaves her fringes –”

Werner argues that the three “Master Letters” are the gravitational center of an as yet undetermined constellation of associated poetical writings. But her work also strongly suggests that the years before the “Master Letters”, particularly the years 1854 to 1857, were not so absent of poetry as Johnson’s and Franklin’s editions suggest. Beyond that, *Writing in Time* throws important new light on Franklin’s great and massively influential work with Dickinson’s fascicles and his now-standard three-volume variorum edition (1998).

In the latter, Franklin numerated Fr 21–31 as a sequence of eleven distinct poems. Previous editions, including Johnson’s *Poems* (1955), presented eight of those texts as three works, each with a startlingly elliptical three-part structure: Fr 21–23 = J 18; Fr 26–27 = J 20 (Figs. C and D); and Fr 29–31 = J 22. But Franklin’s splendid facsimile reconstruction of the fascicles, *The Manuscript Books of Emily Dickinson* (1981), shows that Johnson and previous editors had good documentary authority for judging that in Fascicle 1, Dickinson presented Fr 21–23 and Fr 29–31 as integral poems. Indeed, Fascicle 1 also represents Fr 26–28 as a single poem.¹⁹⁹ In the fascicle manuscripts, Dickinson separated poems by a long manuscript hairline or, if the work filled up a complete page, by the page termination, sometimes adding a hairline as well. Dickinson drew no hairlines between the parts of these three works. Each is complete on a single manuscript page.

Seeing that, one surmises that Dickinson also presented Fr 24–25 as a single poem in Fascicle 1. Like the other three, Fr 24–25 fills up a single manuscript page, and the two parts are not separated by a hairline. Because the conceptual space between this work’s first and second stanzas is even more abrupt than it is between the parts of J 18, J 20, and J 22, Franklin seems to have let an editorial expectation of linguistic continuity eclipse the clear documentary presentation. But Dickinson’s verse is replete with those kinds of conceptual discontinuities, as we know. Besides, we also now recognize that Dickinson’s poetry—indeed, all her writing—was fundamentally

199 Why Johnson integrated Fr 26 and Fr 27 but not Fr 28 is anomalous, given the disposition of the texts in Fascicle 1 on a single page and given that Johnson did integrate the single-page units of Fr 21–23 and Fr 29–31. But in his edition, Johnson presented Fr 28 as a separate poem (J 21). See the discussion and the facsimiles below.

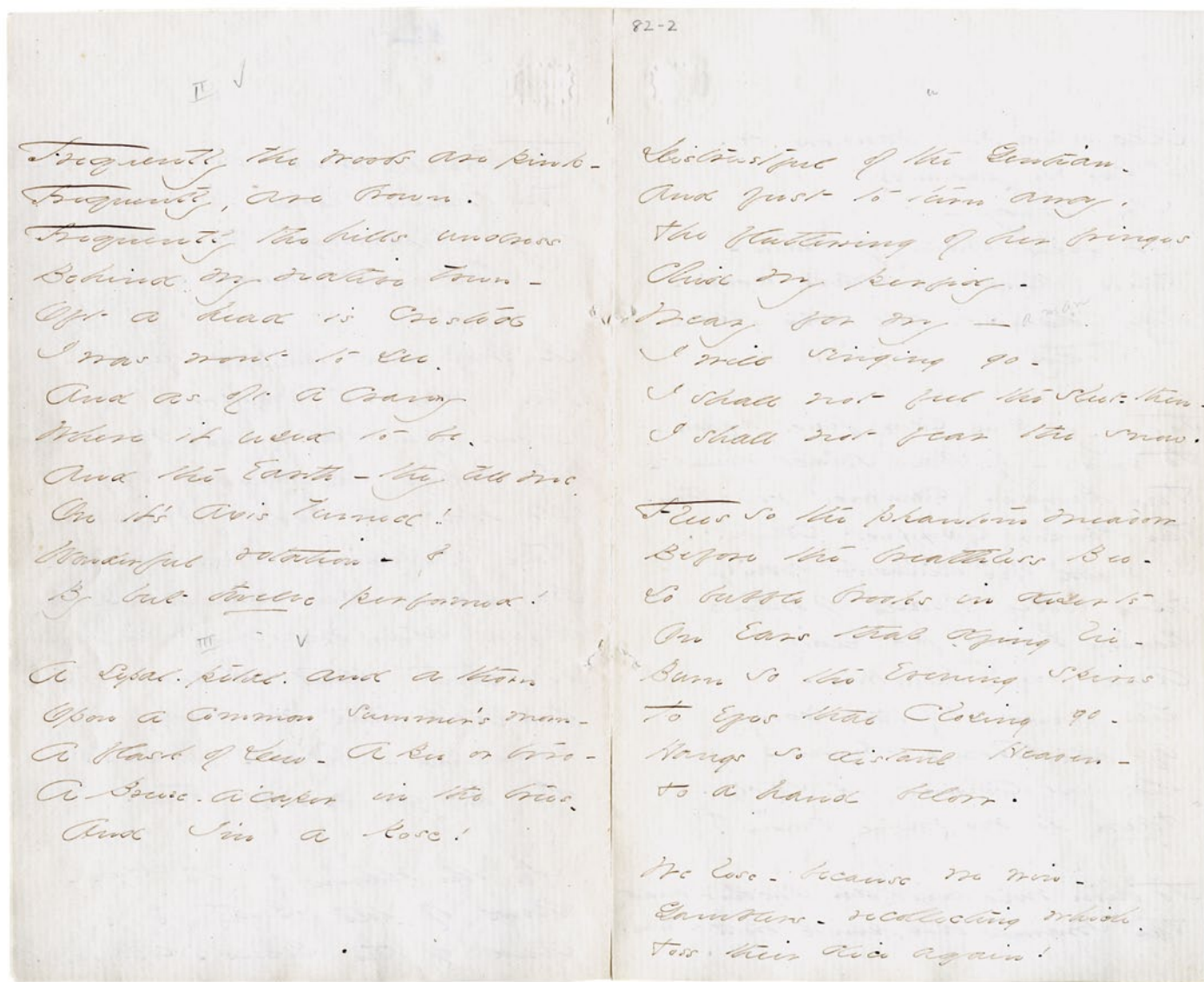


Fig. D. A 82-2 (Fr 26-27; J 20), "Distrustful of the Gentian -"

conceived in documentary terms, not least of all in the fascicles.

In that perspective, the first four pages of Fascicle 1—by any measure the most important of all the fascicles—comprise four poems that are as unusually demanding as any that Dickinson ever penned. Indeed, the fascicle opens with a poem—J 18—that amounts to a coded poetic manifesto.

*The Gentian weaves her fringes –
The Maple's loom is red –
My departing blossoms
Obviate parade.*

*A brief, but patient illness –
An hour to prepare –
And one below, this morning
Is where the angels are –
It was a short procession –
The Bobolink was there –
An aged Bee addressed us –
And then we knelt in prayer –
We trust that she was willing –
We ask that we may be –
Summer – Sister – Seraph!
Let us go with thee!*

*In the name of the Bee –
And of the Butterfly –
And of the Breeze – Amen!*²⁰⁰

Here Dickinson's coded floral apparatus organizes a prayer poem that closes on a sweet parody of the formula "In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, Amen". The natural time is late autumn—"The Maple's loom is red"—when the last of the gentians are poised for their seasonal translation. But that seasonal liturgy is celebrating the moment when Dickinson's verses—her "blossoms"—are "departing" her living hand for a bookish afterlife in the fascicles. "Let us go with thee" is another key parodic line—a recollection of the ancient "Go Little Book" formula that traditionally closes a literary

200 It's quite striking that the core "argument" of this poem is recapitulated much later in "The Gentian has a parched corolla" (Fr 1458), composed around 1877.

work but that Dickinson lays in here at the start, inflecting the poem with the idea that her verses are, by their fascicle incarnation, dying into a new life.

Fascicle 1's next three initiating poems—Fr 24–31 and J 6, 19–22—play three variations on this general perspective and treatment. I shall forgo a detailed explanation because, once recognized, the pattern seems to me impossible to miss, at least for anyone who has grown accustomed to Dickinson's riddling and elliptical procedures.

But Werner's book has provoked one further speculation about Dickinson's writing—in particular, her letter writing—as it evolved before the period covered in *Writing in Time*. Because the subject is so important, it begs a more extensive treatment than is appropriate for this afterword. I will take it up in a subsequent work. Here, in homage to Werner, let me sketch it briefly.

By the time she opened her famous correspondence with Higginson in April 1862, Dickinson had not only written a great deal of poetry, but she had begun to experiment in her letters with what would become one of their most celebrated features: a rhythmic inertia that weaves formal prose with formal verse to create a uniquely, often uncannily, suggestive style.²⁰¹ Though one catches a first few glimpses of it in the letters of 1851 to 1852, it becomes quite noticeable beginning in early 1853—the period when, as we know, she began composing formal verse and was sending poems to Emmons, Sue, and John Graves. In 1853, verse rhythms begin to break out in many of her letters.²⁰² A passage in a letter to Austin (27 March 1853) makes a self-conscious game of free trimeter verse:

201 Susan Howe's *My Emily Dickinson* (Berkeley, CA: North Atlantic Books, 1985) and "These Flames and Generosities of the Heart: Emily Dickinson and the Illogic of Sumptuary Values", *Sulfur* 28 (Spring 1991): 134–55, began what is now an energetic line of study that engages with the documentary features of Dickinson's works. See my "Emily Dickinson's Visible Language", *The Emily Dickinson Journal* 2, no. 2 (1993): 40–57, reprinted in *Emily Dickinson: A Collection of Critical Essays*, ed. Judith Farr (Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1996), pp. 248–59.

202 The letters with poems from 1853 to 1854 include 105, 117, 119, 134, 151, 155, 173, 175; the letters that exhibit clear outbreaks of verse measures in the prose include 102, 103, 110, 115, 116. The few letters from 1855 to 1856 (*Letters* II. 315–30; L 177–86) all are haunted by verse, as the last of them—the brief letter to John Graves—shows especially well: "Ah John – *Gone?* / Then I lift the lid to my box of Phantoms, and lay another in, unto the Resurrection – Then will I gather in *Paradise*, the blossoms fallen here, and on the shores of the sea of Light, seek my missing sands" (*Letters* II. 330).

And Austin is a Poet, Austin writes a psalm. Out of the way, Pegasus, Olympus enough "to him," and just say to those "nine muses" that we have done with them!

Raised a living muse oursekes, worth the whole nine of them. Up, off, tramp!

Now Brother Pegasus, I'll tell you what it is – I've been in the habit myself of writing some few things, and it rather appears to me that you're getting away my patent, so you'd better be somewhat careful, or I'll call the police! (L 110)

"Up, off, tramp!" is particularly brilliant and arresting—a kind of verbal objective correlative for the feet that are running through the passage.

Five years later this simple game with her prose will have turned into a seriously innovative exploration of new possibilities for poetic rhythms. The Bowles letters are probably the most experimentally adventurous, but the three "Master Letters"—not least what appear as "canceled passages"—seem to me laboratory experiments with this kind of writing. The first "Letter" is entirely structured as verse, shifting into and out of regular iambs. The single cancellation near the end is plainly a test of alternative rhythms.

At the heart of Werner's inquiry into the transmission history of the "Master Letters" is a seminal and rarely asked question: Why did she preserve them at all? So to Werner's provocative question I'm inclined to answer: Because they were templates for a "Modern Idiom" she was exploring.²⁰³ Perhaps as well they preserved a memorial record of a momentous turning point—the focus of Werner's book—when Dickinson began seriously to test and model this signature feature of her literary work.

203 David Porter's *Dickinson: The Modern Idiom* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1981) remains for me a signal study of Dickinson's style, a splendid forecast of Cristanne Miller's work, in particular *Emily Dickinson: A Poet's Grammar* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1989). Especially notable is Porter's brief but trenchant discussion of her "impacted poems".

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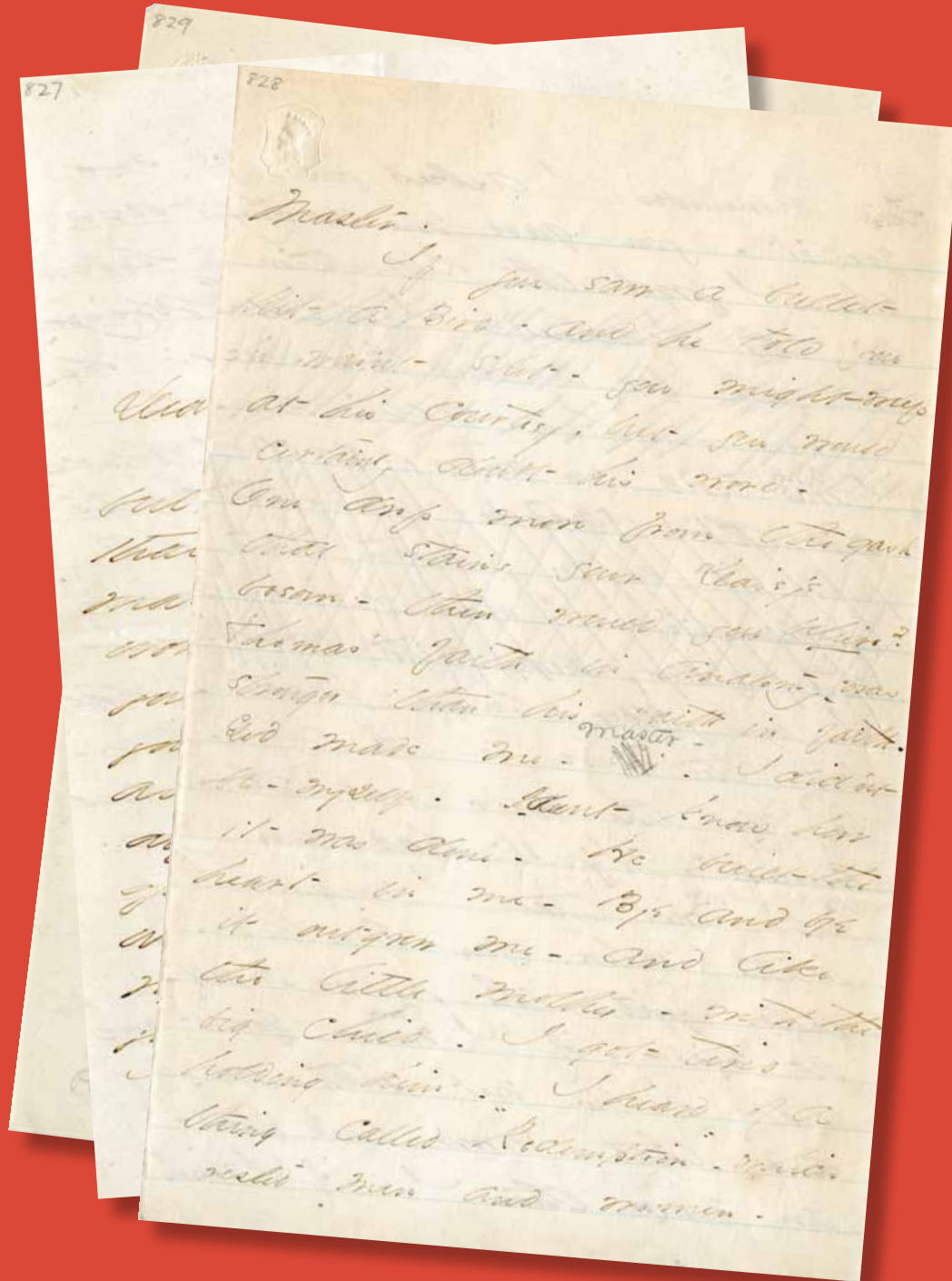
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